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# An Exposition

OF

# Browning's 'Sordello'

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OF

# Browning's 'Sordello'

With Historical and Other Notes

BY

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WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
MCMVI

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# PREFACE.

If *Sordello* is to be read at all, a fresh and independent attempt at its elucidation need make no excuse for its appearing. Many aids, from earnest and thoughtful essays to annotated editions that had best be regarded as practical jokes, have been offered to the student of this strange intellectual product, but it is generally acknowledged that it remains a 'dark poem.'

"But that lock went damnable hard," says the Immortal Tinker, when describing his pilgrims' attempt to escape from Doubting Castle. The words have often come nigh me as I have tried to force my way into the stronghold of the Giant Despair of our literature to rifle its treasures: if my readers can conscientiously finish the sentence of which the words quoted form a part, I shall be more than satisfied.

During the preparation of my work I have received kindness at the hands of many friends. My thanks are due to those who have given me free access to their books, and to those who, out of the stores of their own knowledge, have aided me in following up references. Dr John Sutherland Black, besides revising the proofs,

has kindly contributed an account of the historical Sordello, which will be found in the Appendix. The Rev. Robert Law, B.D., has subjected my work to a persistent, vigorous, and far-reaching criticism; and this invaluable service, which I cannot acknowledge in its details, I would acknowledge here as heartily as it was generously rendered. Mr Law has also kindly revised the proofs.

DAVID DUFF.

EDINBURGH, *April* 1906.

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ERRATUM.

Omit note on Book I., line 275, page 10.

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The text referred to is that of the seventeen-volume edition published by Smith, Elder, & Co. The reader will find it easy to number the lines by fives.

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This makes him change his intention with regard to the rest of Sordello's story. What will finally lay hold of his hero's soul will be, not merely some interest outside of himself, whatever its moral quality, but what conscience tells him is a good cause. God

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# AN EXPOSITION OF 'SORDELLO.'

## BOOK THE FIRST.

### Ll. 1-73.

*Browning raises Sordello out of the darkness of the Middle Ages, tells how he will treat his subject, and collects an audience.*

I AM about to tell the story of Sordello. If you give me your hearty attention it will indeed be more than a story; for I will describe him so vividly that he will seem to live before you. He is distinct to me, even amid dark and confused times of old history; just as, amid the dust on the lower ground, Don Quixote, standing on his hill, could discern Pentapolin doing battle. 1-10. Browning raises Sordello.

Out of this dark period I bring Verona.

First, however, let me say that, but for one consideration, I would not have chosen the narrative form for my poem. I would rather have made Sordello the subject of a drama—would have merely introduced him, as it were, and then sat with you to see him act out his part without comment of mine. But he is a strange character, and difficult to deal with; therefore, as the exhibitor of any extraordinary object either chalks its 10-31. The form of the work.

name over it, or describes it at the end of his pointer, I must set him up before you and discuss and criticise him in detail.

**31-73.** His audience consists of a few of the living and many of the dead.

So, my audience, I am ready to address you. Some of you are spirits of departed bards, coming hither from heaven or from hell. If fate denies us living admirers, we poets can fish up friends from the dead to hear us; so that it is not hers to say whether we, being popular, may go on with our songs, or, being unpopular, shall have to keep silence. Grant that I have a mere handful of live admirers, see what a host I can bring from the grave, to learn how we modern poets deal with the great art. There they sit, trying to look life-like! Keen critic of long ago, you are cheek by jowl with——— But I might stir up old animosities and, by causing a disturbance in the audience, move the anger of Death, who, as it is, grudges them leave of absence.

**54-59.** Browning not indifferent to praise.

Well, friends,—I mean my live ones, chosen because you care something for me,—do not think I am indifferent to judicious praise: I will watch you, to make sure you give my story a fair chance, and will try to win your approval.

Now let Verona appear!

**60-73.** The shade of Shelley is invited to stay away.

But wait once more! Spirit of Shelley, join not the ranks of my hearers, lest you paralyse me with your pure face. You alone I fear of all the spirits. Your poetry is so fine that I dare make no effort in your presence. Compared with yours, the language of Æschylus sounds like the noise of his spear at Marathon when it rasped the opposing Persian's shield; and even the silver speech of Sidney, that most brilliant knight, sounds like the harsh note of trumpets at a tournament. How could I find heart to keep my characters performing before this my worthy audience if you were here?

6. 'Pentapolin.' Looking down on the dust raised by a flock of sheep, Don Quixote persuades Sancho into a vision of the army of Alifanfaron. "And that other behind us," he adds, "belongs to his mortal enemy, the king of the Garamanteans, known by

the name of Pentapolin with the naked arm, because he always goes to battle with the sleeve of his right arm tucked up" (*Don Quixote*, Pt. I. ch. iv.)

25. 'fresh-chapleted.' Like guests listening to songs at a Greek or a Roman banquet. Or perhaps as poets who have been crowned for victory in their art.

52. 'clear-witted critic, by.' The side of a poet he has handled severely.

60. 'thou, spirit.' Browning was an enthusiastic admirer of Shelley. Compare his apostrophe in *Pauline*—

> "Sun-treader, life and light be thine for ever."

His Essay on Shelley (1852) shows his admiration did not belong only to his youth.

65. 'the Athenian.' Æschylus fought against the Persians not only at Marathon but at Platæa and Salamis.

69. 'Sidney's self.' Sir Philip Sidney is credited with having developed English as a literary tongue. See Hallam's *Introduction to the Literature of Europe*, Pt. II. ch. vii.

## Ll. 73-308.

*Bringing up Verona, the poet sets us in the midst of Guelf and Ghibellin strife.*

73-86. Verona appears.

Here, then, comes Verona, thrust up out of the dark past, and gradually gaining some clearness of outline. Our piece of history is more than six hundred years old. Frederick the Second was then Holy Roman Emperor, and Honorius the Third was Pope.

87-100. Excitement in the city.

It was a quiet autumn evening. The crimson light of the setting sun, as it lay on the dark distant woods, looked like the flame of a giant torch, of which the black forest formed the stock. But only one eye rested on the still beauty of the sky. The city was all excitement, and among the groups that gathered in the market-place words of passion were heard, and faces were livid with anger, for men who trade in death were among them in the hope of urging them to fight. And to note how the wine of hate, the fruit of fear, worked differently in different sets! Old men with dead-cold

hearts shut their eyes as if they relished a pleasant drink, while the young were mad with delight at the thought of their first taste of blood.

100-109. Their prince a prisoner.

Now, here is what caused the excitement.

The Prince of Verona, Count Richard of St Boniface, who, a year before, had joined with Azzo, Lord of Este, to drive Taurello Salinguerra, Ecelin of Romano's right-hand man, out of Ferrara, had overreached himself, and was a prisoner in Taurello's hands.

110-126. Two parties in Verona.

These evil tidings make the Veronese seek help for Azzo and Boniface from the Lombard League, which was composed of fifteen cities, banded together to promote the Guelf, or Papal, cause. Not all the citizens, however, are on the same side. "Your purple shield is down," cries one of the Ghibellin party. "Azzo of Este only makes himself a laughing-stock when he tries to imitate Ecelin; as if it were a small matter to rise to power like his! The patron tells you plainly that Ecelin is to be head in the land."

"By all that's sacred," retorts one of the Estians, "why should our Azzo not rise to be supreme? Your leader may get on at times by dint of a certain cunning, but ours, in spite of a reverse or two, is a noble character. Your Ecelin is a hill-cat; our Azzo is a lion."

127-187. What led to the capture of their prince.

One of the envoys then explains how Count Boniface was caught at Ferrara, his story going back to show what led up to the catastrophe.

"At Ferrara," he said, "Taurello Salinguerra was, some time ago, like an osprey that mopes far inland on the ground till the tempest awakes and calls him to flight. Taurello waited for the Emperor, but Frederick came not. Besides, his leader, Ecelin da Romano, had turned monk, and was withering away at Oliero, where he sat doited, counting how many of his wicked ancestors would have to give way to him in the high places of hell when he got there. The Guelfs accordingly became confident in Ferrara. When you hear that one of them could pass safely through a crowd of

Ghibellins on a narrow street, you may imagine what a change had taken place.

"Suddenly Taurello Salinguerra went off to be Podestà at Padua. 'I am supposed to be the only cause of strife here in Ferrara,' he said, 'and I will go for the sake of peace.' No sooner was his back turned than the Guelfs attacked the Ghibellins, burned their two palaces, and ravaged their gardens. But the following week their delight was converted into terror. In some mysterious way Taurello was back, riding through the blood of his enemies. Azzo fled, followed by any others that were not caught and killed, and Salinguerra was once more sole master of the city.

172-187. He had been entrapped by Taurello Salinguerra.

"After a time, however, Azzo, feeling stronger, got Count Richard to join him in trying to win Ferrara from the Ghibellin. The siege was a cruel one. The burghers were maddened by seeing the enemies' camp established amid the corn on the small piece of land they had laboriously reclaimed from the marsh, while they themselves were reduced to cannibalism. At last Taurello invited Count Richard within the walls, that terms of peace might be arranged. Richard enters the city. With kindly consideration he takes with him only a few retainers, lest he should terrify the more timid citizens! They jog along easily, annoyed by the sight of the large number of Guelf houses Salinguerra had burned. The place is marvellously silent. 'Why doesn't he come to meet us, since he has given in?' quoth the Count.

"And they find themselves Taurello Salinguerra's prisoners!"

186-205. Frederick II., being excommunicated, descends on Lombardy.

Such, then, was the aspect of affairs six hundred years ago. Frederick II. had dropped all pretence of being in any way dependent on the Papacy. Refusing to go on a crusade to help John of Brienne, who sought to take possession of the Holy City, of which he was called king, and being determined not to give back to the Papal power what Otho and Barbarossa had wrested from it, he was excommunicated. "Barbarossa come to life

again!" groaned the League; and the citizens of Lombardy, eager for the fray, took up the cry of Guelf or of Ghibellin.

205-237. What 'Emperor' and what 'Pope' stand for.

Now, what did these names stand for?

For the Ghibellin, or Imperial, feudatories in Lombardy, Frederick's coming meant no less than their preservation. Swooping down on the country with the power of the Empire at their back, they had settled there and, till lately, had lived pleasantly and carelessly enough. But now they began to see how quickly the strength of the Papal party was increasing. When they first appeared in North Italy they were like rocks thrust up through the waters by an earthquake, but now the Papal influence was like some weed-growth that was fast covering the surface and was even threatening to overwhelm the rocks themselves. Another earthquake would heave the rocks higher and scatter wide the growth—another Imperial invasion would uplift the feudatories once more and sweep away the increasing power of the Guelfs.

But what a misfortune this would be! Was it for nothing better than this result that the Papal influence had shone in Lombardy? That influence may not have made much of the people all at once, but, as, under the sunlight, the scum on the waters may grow into a network of fibres, and the fibres knit themselves together till at last they form a solid surface, there was hope that, some day, they of Lombardy might develop into a great and glorious race.

"Therefore," says the Guelf, who has thus put the two views of the situation, "we cry to the Pope, who first gave us rights and improves our life, to save us from the Emperor."

237-308. The representatives of the two parties. Ancestry of the Ghibellin leader.

Or let us look at the opposing parties in the light of their leaders.

We must carry our history back a little. Ecelo was the first to introduce Imperial influence into Northern Italy. Coming as a stranger into Lombardy, he soon ingratiated himself with his neighbours, his affected

gentle manners soothing them when he, a Saxon scout of whose name they were not sure, presumed to settle beside them. So he kept rooting himself in the country, till the Emperor Conrad regarded his as the best house in the Trevisan. While enrolling his possessions in the records at Milan, they laughed at his rapid growth; but there was no laughing when, after his death, his son, Ecelin, styling himself, forsooth, the 'Lombard Chief,' welcomed Barbarossa at Roncaglia. Sadness falls upon all the mountain-villages when they see this man will be their despot. Meaning to 'take charge of them,' he builds numberless castles on the hills. In short, he becomes the very nightmare of the Church's dreams: he represents a foreign power, retaining its foreign interests and lording it, on behalf of the Empire, over a new district. It looks as if Otho's boast that the German Este would supplant the Italian Este were likely to be fulfilled.

278-291. Ecelin II. da Romano and Taurello Salinguerra, his chief soldier.

This Ecelin I. had a son, Ecelin II., who was as cruel as his father. He, in turn, had sons and daughters, gifted with all the insinuation and cunning of the race. He took the title of Romano. In spite of the prosperity of his house and his wealth of relatives, his leanness was ghastly—was such as to prove that a devil dwelt within him and preyed upon his vitals. He became incapable of action, and turned monk at Oliero. Taurello Salinguerra, on the other hand, who was Ecelin's chief instrument, was a lonely man, his family having been taken one by one; but he was quite pleased to toil for a cause—the growth of the House of Romano. He was looked upon as a good-humoured soldier, who took life with easy carelessness.

291-308. The House of Este on the Papal side.

Now take the leader of the Guelf party. How absurd, said his retainers, that the family from the hills should venture to oppose Azzo of Este! To sing his praises would be to dishonour him; for history knows well this supporter of the Church. He is descended from the Attii of Roman Republican days, and from Este of Padua, who repulsed the Huns. All about Azzo

and his family, and his enormous estates, may be found in the history begun by a Veronese monk, when young and strong, to relieve the monotony of his convent life, and finished by him when he was so old and frail that he could scarcely explain why the first ten lines of his monastery's charter, granted by Pope Gregory VII., had been blotted out.

78. 'The Second Friedrich' (1198-1260) was the son of Henry VI., who will appear in the poem, and the grandson of Frederick Barbarossa.

79. 'Third Honorius.' Pope from 1216 to 1226. He conferred the Imperial crown on Frederick II. in 1220.

103. 'Azzo.' The Sixth. The following passage from Hallam's *Europe during the Middle Ages*, ch. iii., explains the relation between Marquis and Count, and gives other useful information: "Under the Lombard and French princes, every city with its adjacent district was subject to the government and jurisdiction of a count, who was himself subordinate to the duke or marquis of the province. From these counties it was the practice of the first German Emperors to dismember particular towns or tracts of country, granting them upon a feudal tenure to rural lords, by many of whom also the same title was assumed. Thus by degrees the authority of the original officers was confined almost to the walls of their own cities; and in many cases the bishop obtained a grant of the temporal government, and exercised the functions which had belonged to the count."

105. 'Ecelin.' The Second. Romano was in the Trevisan. Most of the places mentioned in *Sordello* will be found in any good atlas. The following is a 'tree' of the Ecelin (Ezzelino) family:—

Ecelin (the 'Ecelo' of l. 248 and Bk. IV., l. 452).
|
Alberic.
|
Ecelin I. ('The Stammerer').
|
Ecelin II. (Monk).
|
Ecelin III. and Alberic.

It will be observed that the first Ecelin is not numbered, and that Browning omits the first Alberic. (Sismondi's *Histoire des Républiques Italiennes du Moyen Âge*, ch. xii.)

110. 'the Lombard League' was formed against Barbarossa in 1167, and was renewed against Frederick II. in 1226.

115. 'purple pavis.' The emblem of the House of Este was a white eagle on a field of blue. The Ghibellins' colour was red.

119. 'patron.' Evidently the Emperor.

123. 'The hill-cat.' Nobles like Ecelin were independent of the cities, and dwelt in castles built on the hills.

127. 'as in wane.' As if his power were on the wane.

138. 'Ecelin.' The Second.

142. 'when the doze deposits him.' Take this with 'dozes now at Oliero.' It means, 'when his dull, stagnant life ends.'

145-46. Probably not historical in this connection.

150. 'Podestà.' The podestàs, or chief magistrates, were first appointed to Lombard cities by Frederick Barbarossa. At the period of the poem they were appointed by the cities themselves. The podestà, who was always of noble family, seems to have come from some neighbouring city, and acted as general, criminal judge, and preserver of the peace. The idea was to place an impartial and strong-handed ruler over the different factions. "The law," says Hallam (*Europe during the Middle Ages*, ch. iii.), "was to be enforced, not against an individual, but a family; not against a family, but a faction; not, perhaps, against a local faction, but the whole Guelf or Ghibelin name, which might become interested in the quarrel. The podestà was to arm the republic against her refractory citizen; his house was to be besieged and razed to the ground, his defenders to be quelled by violence; and thus the people, become familiar with outrage and homicide under the command of their magistrates, were more disposed to repeat such scenes at the instigation of their passions."

165. 'would pounce.' Insisted on pouncing.

166. 'ounce.' "It is about the size of the common leopard, but lighter in colour, with longer fur and less distinct spots" (*Encyc. Brit.*)

167. 'the gorged bird.' Taurello, the 'osprey.'

187. 'into the trap.' This is historical. (Muratori's *Annali d'Italia.* Anno 1224.)

193. 'the new Hohenstauffen.' Frederick II. The founder of the House was Friedrich von Buren (d. 1105), who, on marrying the Emperor Henry IV.'s daughter, received the Duchy of Suabia, and built a castle on Staufen, a hill near Stuttgart. The early fortunes of the family are sketched in T. L. Kington's *History of Frederick the Second.*

194. 'John of Brienne.' Frederick II.'s second wife was John's daughter Yolande, or Iolanthe.

197. 'Otho.' The First, who died in 967. Exercising high

authority in the affairs of Rome, he even deposed a Pope—John XII.

199. 'Pope Honorius' fear.' The fear that Frederick II., who inherited the two Sicilies and Naples from his father, Henry VI., would trouble the Papacy if he were not put to some other work. It was Gregory IX., however, who excommunicated Frederick (1227).

200. 'that very year.' The League was renewed in the year 1226, in which the Emperor was not excommunicated.

201. 'The triple-bearded Teuton.' Barbarossa (Red Beard). According to legend he was not dead, but sat with his six knights at a marble table in Kyffhäuserberg, in Thuringia. After his beard had grown three times round the marble slab of the table, he would appear again to give Germany the first place among the powers of the world. Similar legends (without the beard) are told of Charlemagne, Arthur, and others.

207. 'leapt down with a crash.' Chiefly under Barbarossa.

221. 'the bruised and sullen wreck.' As, from a Guelf point of view, Lombardy would be after a second great Imperial invasion.

223. 'for that!' The renewal of the Imperial influence.

226. 'took hold again.' Lombardy almost entirely recovered its independence after the defeat of Barbarossa at Legnano (1176).

227. 'so kindly blazed it.' The Papal sun.

241-42. 'sleek but that ruffling fur, Those talons to their sheath.' Cat Ecelo speaks, as it were, to himself. Policy makes him conceal for a time his cruel nature. Cp. Bk. III., l. 448 f.

248. 'Conrad.' The Second, Emperor from 1024 to 1039.

257. 'Roncaglia.' Barbarossa held his first diet there in 1154, and heard complaints by certain cities against Milan. The second diet, at which he defined the 'regalian' rights, belongs to the year 1158.

274. 'my own Este shall supplant.' Albert Azzo II. of Este married Cunitza, a sister of Welf (Guelf) III., Duke of Carinthia. This Welf dying without issue, the son of Albert Azzo and Cunitza succeeded to his inheritance. From the House thus established the present line of British sovereigns is descended (Article "Este" in *Encyc. Brit.*; Kington's *History of Frederick II.*); and the Ecelins came from the same branch (Sismondi's *Hist. des Rép. Ital.*, ch. xiii.)

275. 'The sire led in.' Ecelin I. was really his grandson. See the 'tree,' note on l. 105.

294, 295. 'Atii at Rome,' 'Este at Padua.' The family of the Azzos, whose succession cannot be traced farther back than 917, were probably of Longobard origin.

298. 'Ferrara's . . .' March or territory.

307. 'to blot those ten lines out.' Such alteration of charters is said to have been common in the Middle Ages.

## Ll. 309-345.

*We get a glimpse of Sordello on the famous 'Verona night.'*

309-345. We see Sordello sitting alone in a secret chamber of the palace at Verona.

We must now turn to another scene of the night on which the tidings of Count Richard's capture arrived. While in his palace the City's Council of Twenty-four are discussing the position of affairs, we imagine ourselves passing beyond the lights of the cresset lamps and the traffic of the place till we gain a certain recess, from which all illumination and every sound save the booming of the carroch are shut out. Seizing the arms that lie ready on the bench, you could rush out, at a given signal, through its spring-door and surprise your chosen victims as they sit at table; or you could come forth to startle the guests with some piece of mummery. There is no revelry to-night. One man, the dying lamp-flame rising and falling on his brow, reclines in the banquet-chamber. Is he asleep? No; he sits motionless because he is filled with the vision of a woman who has just passed from him through the arras. Her words still hang about the room, and the stirring of her robe remains in his ear. So he waits, wrapt in the fancy of her presence, till an outcry from the square below makes him rise out of her subtle influence. The dawning light shows us his gay dress, and what it almost conceals— a body lean and worn, like the taper, once alight at his marriage-feast, that the Armenian keeps, hidden away in his wedding-robe of wool, against his dying day.

340-345. His leanness.

312. 'Ferrara's fate.' They consider whether they can rescue Ferrara from Taurello Salinguerra.

317. 'the carroch's booming.' The carroch (carroccio) was "a heavy car drawn by oxen, and covered with the flags and armorial bearings of the city. A high pole rose in the middle of this car,

bearing the colours and a Christ, which seemed to bless the army with both arms extended. A priest said daily mass at an altar placed in front of the car. The trumpeters of the community, seated on the back part, sounded the charge and the retreat" (Sismondi's short *History of the Italian Republics*, ch. i.)

328. 'does that one man sleep.' The man is Sordello. This scene belongs to the last stage of his career, and its introduction here is an anticipation of a large part of Bk. III., ll. 260-592.

330. 'What woman.' Palma, who loves him.

341. 'the gay dress.' He is court minstrel.

## Ll. 345-373.

*An apostrophe to Dante. This Sordello, of whom we have had a glimpse, has been absorbed by the greater Italian poet, who refers to him in the 'Divina Commedia' and elsewhere; but Browning will extricate him and treat of him independently.*

345-359. Sordello has been absorbed by Dante.

This Sordello, the moving soul of Lombardy, is thine, O Dante! He was thy herald star, and thou, the perfect orb, didst absorb him and so disinherit him of his peculiar glory. Yet, even so, God has not suffered him to be lost in thy greater name; for, though held within thee, he burns with a brightness of his own.

360-373. But Browning will extricate him.

But what if I disengage him altogether from the great orb which we name by thy name alone, and speak of him as he was in himself, and ere thou didst appear? Dante—thou who, unharmed, hast paced the shore of hell, and hast visited the dark waters of Purgatory, over which broodeth hope, and hast beheld God's chosen ones in Paradise—I would do this. What if I should falter now!

346. 'gate-vein.' The *Vena Portæ*. That this means the 'moving soul' appears from Bk. III., l. 556.

347. 'for he is thine!' Virgil and Dante meet Sordello in Purgatory, and they journey together for some time.

> ". . . The shadow, in itself absorbed,
> Rose toward us from the place in which it stood,
> And cried, 'Mantuan, I am thy countryman
> Sordello.'"
>
> Canto VI. (Cary).

354. 'serenest of the progeny of God.' Of poets. Sordello is a marvellous genius.

355. 'Who.' God.

'His darling.' Sordello. How far, from a moral standpoint, he could be called 'God's darling,' the reader must judge for himself from the completed tale.

358. 'its.' The herald star's—Sordello's.

362. 'that under-current.' *Sordello.* 'Its fierce mate' is the more personal element of Dante in his writings, and 'the majestic mass' is Dante as a whole.

365. 'John's transcendent vision.' Rev. xv. 2.

367. 'where glutted hell.'

> "In the third circle I arrive, of showers
> Ceaseless, accursed, heavy and cold, unchanged
> For ever, both in kind and in degree.
> Large hail, discoloured water, sleety flaw
> Through the dun midnight air streamed down amain;
> Stank all the land whereon that tempest fell."
>
> —*Hell*, Canto VI. (Cary).

369. 'the grieved and obscure waters.' *Purgatory.* Is the reference to the solitary shore

> "That never sailing on its waters saw
> Man that could after measure back his course"?—Canto I.

372. 'gracious twilights.' This would apply to the Earthly Paradise (in Purgatory), rather than to Paradise.

## Ll. 374-444.

*We have a description of Sordello's home, the castle of Goito, with its surroundings.*

374-389. The site of Goito Castle.

Half of the territory around Mantua is pine-forest; the other half, dry in summer,—when the river Mincio is choked with sand,—is, in winter, a marsh, even up to the walls of the city. About thirty years before this troubled evening at Verona there stood, on a reclaimed piece of ground, the castle of Goito. It was built in the midst of a few low mountains, the main defiles of which were hidden by firs and larches, and their slopes covered with circling vineyards. Like some captured animal, too much interested in its enclosure to be distressed, and always

taken up with its own beauty, the castle lifted its head lightly above the confining vines, among which the lapwings loved to glean at the ripening time of grapes.

389-405. The maple-panelled room.

Passing through a maze of corridors, fit places for dark deeds, thence up dusky winding stairs and along dim galleries, you reach the inmost chambers, the last of them being a room with maple panelling. As you note when a sunbeam falls upon it, the haze floating above the woodwork is the gold lettering of Arabic inscriptions; and the dark lines that fall upon the characters are the shadows of the slim pillars by which the roof is supported, and which are carved like palms meeting one another in their foliage at the top—representatives, in the carver's mind, of bacchanals carrying a goat-skin of ripe grapes.

406-444. The vault.

But hasten to the greatest sight of the castle — a vault! Darkness hangs about the ceiling, but slits in the wall let fall a fitful light on a wondrous piece of work in the midst. A heavy font, of dull and grey-streaked stone, is supported on the shoulders of a group of caryatides, made of marble lovely as the snowy flesh of Eve when God first tinged it with the hue of life. With eyes half closed they all look to the ground. Some have their arms crossed behind their backs; some have them folded on their breasts; some hold them aloft as though to veil their eyes; some use them as props to chin and cheek; while others hang slack in all their length, like a vestal virgin when she hears the grating fall to shut her in her living tomb. So they dwell in patience, like priestesses who, having tasted to the full the sweets of carnal sin, endure their perpetual punishment without complaint.

428-444. Sordello's ministry of imagination in the vault.

Hither every evening came Sordello, to pray for pardon for them. Sitting with each in turn, he for a time became one with her through the sympathy of his imagination. A sense of awe ever lay upon him till the sunset came slanting in rays of purest gold through the buttress-chinks; then he saw the maiden stirred to a pathetic smile, as though her load of sin had been somewhat

lightened and another thought of penitence reckoned to her good by the recording angel of the vault. And after each visit Sordello would come away with a lighter step and a heart enlarged.

Ah! but it is his story I mean to tell, and I must now begin in earnest.

380. 'spoil.' Evidently the morass.

398. 'marred them a moment.' Why only a moment?

422. 'as a buried vestal.' At Rome unchaste vestals were buried alive in the Campus Sceleratus, which was situated just within the wall near the Porta Collina.

434. 'globed.' Gold is refined in globes.

'our maiden.' The one whose turn it is to have Sordello sit beside her. Browning is fond of this half 'ethical' use of the possessive pronoun.

## Ll. 444-482.

*Sordello is in the forefront of natures specially framed for the perception of beauty.*

444-461. The boy Sordello at Goito.

In or about the castle of Goito may be seen, always alone, a slender boy, wearing the loose dress of a page. It is Sordello. Only look at him while, in autumn, he watches the thieving birds among the ripening vineyards, or while, in winter, when the storm is raging without, he holds his torch aloft with both hands and throws its light on the arras, on which are embroidered the figures of Ecelo, father of the brood, and Ecelin the First, with his wife Auria, and Ecelin the Second, with all his wives, from Agnes of Este to the Tuscan Adelaide, who is now lady of the castle. Observe the boy's face as he turns away. The delicate nostril, the sharp and restless lip, and the calm brow: these signify a creature fitted to drink in delight at every sense. You can believe that he stands foremost in the royal class of men that Nature has made alive to beauty in an extraordinary degree, just as she has formed lands where to turn up the earth

461-482. His sensitiveness to beauty.

is to make spices grow and there is no limit to the increase of the most intricate beauty in the flower. In Sordello eye and ear are avenues to a loveliness that most men can only dimly see: to such as he the sky is bluer and the sun brighter than to the common sort.

## Ll. 483-522.

*Of men belonging to this regal class some are passionate in their devotion to objects not themselves.*

**483-504. Devotion of some of the regal class to things without themselves.**

What in the way of loving is possible to souls of the regal class? This may be their experience. With each discovery of beauty they are for a while enchanted, but their love grows till it becomes oppressive. Then, because they cannot help the inanimate object of their devotion by anything they can do, their imagination endows it with will and purpose and aims, such as may worthily employ a thing of so fine a nature. New discoveries, too, are ever being made. Things of beauty are succeeded by things of greater beauty still, each object wearing the crown of homage only till a fairer one appear to claim it. And at last individual forms, thus seen one by one in their beauty, combine to express the sum of loveliness: the earth is God's, and God Himself fills it with His presence.

**505-522. Its intensity.**

Now, observe these natures in their progress from worship to worship, with all its stir of passion, and you will note that their great characteristic is their absolute need of devotedly losing themselves in something not themselves. To each revelation of beauty they must belong, and it becomes stronger and stronger in its claim upon them until at length they are lost in it, and ask not whence its dominion over them arose. With them it is as it was with light, which, according to legend, flowed together through space in one great stream till the spheres were hurled blank out of chaos, when it

rushed into each of them, and lost its independent brilliancy.

Well, let such natures so lose themselves if they will!

483. 'How can such love?' Strong emphasis on 'can.' When it does get a chance in these regal natures, love is peculiarly passionate.

491. 'with life from their own soul.' To its devotees music, for example, becomes a living soul—a St Cæcilia. In Wordsworth's heart nature was at least the voice of God. The same applies to any creation or art or science that absorbs a rich nature.

492. 'availing it.' Endowing it with power. The idea of this passage is repeated in l. 735 f.

503. 'owns the mystic rod.' Is there a reference here?

504. The lesson of *Sordello* appears in the passage closing with this line. It is devotion to some object (this word being used in its widest sense) for its own sake, and not to something that will merely display a man's powers to his fellows, that fills a life with meaning and joy. The whole poem is meant to drive home this truth—a truth which, as we are about to hear, men of extraordinary genius are apt to miss. See Bk. VI., l. 26 f.

516. 'a legend.' Probably the story of creation in the first chapter of Genesis.

522. 'Let such forego.' A sort of kindly irony. Their life is lost to admiration of their own inward ideals, and is saved in an absorbing love.

## Ll. 523-553.

*On the other hand, there are members of the regal class who, far from devoting themselves to anything not themselves, regard each revelation of beauty as a mere reflection of a type already existing in their own souls.*

523-534. Other members of the regal class are self-centred and self-contained.

Let such, I say, lose themselves if they will. For there is another class of regal natures, the members of which, while, of course, like the gentler crew already described, they have the keenest sense of beauty, regard each of its revelations as but a duplicate of what is already in their consciousness. Any fine quality they see displayed in actual life they take as an instinct of

their own soul: the instinct is now, as it were, expressed for them, but it has always been within them, if only as a dream. The exercise by others of any function in which the idea of being fair, good, wise, or strong is implied, has been theirs in conception all along. Whose fault is it if the conception is never wrought out by themselves—if they do not find their own expression for it? There is no fault at all: far from blaming themselves, they do themselves homage. "How should the failure to act out such conceptions deject thee, my soul?" they murmur. "Why should the power of thine inward life be quenched simply because, fit opportunities for the proper revelation of these conceptions being withheld, thou lackest the means of outward expression that belong to common men, who, indeed, are cumbered by their means of expression, which are far too great for anything there is in them to express,—who have not a mind like thine, which existence itself, with all its wealth, cannot satisfy and cannot surprise, since thou hast already dreamed the fairest it can show? Laugh thou at envious fate, which denies thee sufficient temporal powers to reveal thy soul—thou who dost boldly soar from the conception of the nature of the lowest form of individual life, too slenderly endowed to feel its earthly limitations, to the conception of heaven's complexest essence, and art able to realise in thine imagination all existences in the universe, however grand they be."

**535-548. And do homage to themselves.**

**548-553. A sarcastic apostrophe to the self-centred soul.**

Indeed! Thou hast life, then, and, by ascending in imagination to the highest things, wilt claim life for us common men also? In thy ascent the capacity of our whole race is vindicated, and the meanest of us, though our minds are so contracted now, will be able to follow thee and rise at last to the same heights?

536. 'without.' To some object.

537-542. It may be advisable to give a closer, if somewhat inelegant, paraphrase here. "Wherefore should thy (the soul's)

strength be quelled simply because, that strength's trivial accidents of a bodily equipment fit for its expression in actual life being withheld, it misses organs which, on the other hand, are in proportion granted in too great measure to the common world, which is inert and has not a mind like thine to quicken and exert these organs—not a mind like thine, which is so rich in innate ideas that nothing on earth can satisfy or surprise it?"

Except in two cases (Bk. v., l. 170 and l. 366), 'will' (noun) means the mind, regarded especially as the realm of conceptions and of imagination generally. As a verb, it has the ordinary meaning (Bk. v., l. 140).

543. 'from earth's simplest combination.' To be taken with 'dost soar.'

545. 'its.' 'Earth's simplest combination's.'

547. 'unaffronted.' By not living out any of these conceptions.

## Ll. 553-567.

*Two dangers await the self-centred members of the regal class. In actual life they do nothing, and so fail; or they fail through attempting the impossible, by striving to attain the realisation of all their conceptions.*

553-561. Such a soul is tempted to inaction.

But what if a certain mood make the self-centred soul rest idle in its lofty idealism and prevent it from stooping down to use any of its powers for the good of man as opportunity, limited as that is bound to be, may permit! Life and time, it feels, are too small a stage for the display of all that is within it—the occasion the world offers for action is too small for the exhibition of its vast endowments.

561-566. Or to try to realise itself completely in this life.

Or what if a worse thing happen—if such a soul be seized with a desire to put forth its whole nature in actual life, and try to work out all its ideals in the contracted sphere of human existence,—if, in short, it strive to fulfil in time a purpose that demands eternity?

## Ll. 567-603.

*About to say that into these fatal errors Sordello fell, Browning arrests himself: why anticipate unpleasant facts?*

This is what may befall the regal class; so that Sordello——

But why hasten to speak of his life's disease, which already, alas! as he loiters at Goito, might be detected upon him like the first dark marks of leprosy? We would look rather at the glorious time to which he belonged, and to which his soul was kin. His life beginning with the thirteenth century, he grows up with the new art of Italy. Greeks may be seen walking in Florence, and the Pisan pair have already felt the new influence: what if Nicolo yet show taste and power in the carving of a Christus! while, at Siena, Guidone sits painfully thinking out, for his painting in Saint Eufemia's sacristy or transept, the colours he has gained from one great gaze at the moon. For it is the moon's colours that appear in his work. You see the same orange haze, the same blue stripe round that, and, in the midst of these, the ghostly whiteness of the figure of the Madonna, which seized the painter's imagination and would not let it go.

: 569-583. Sordello is born with the medieval art of Italy.

583-603. Think of the pleasant things in his life, and do not anticipate his errors.

Woe betide, then, any officious babble that would let out the disease that was upon Sordello—a disease that is bound to prove fatal to a spirit lodged in human flesh. Rather go back to his boyhood, and take no note of the trouble except as may be required by each stage of his history. The end was piteous, but there was much in him that we can study with pleasure. Meantime, get some box in which to shut away the evil thing as a complete growth. Otherwise we shall be like the Romans who (in the joint Emperorship of mad Lucius and wise Antonine), when sacking Babylon

near Apollo's shrine, found a certain chest, from which, when the man whose prize it was opened it greedily, there curled a plague injurious to the world as Sordello's was to prove. Shut in the ugly thing till the proper time be come for its appearing. There! we have fastened down the lid and put the chest safely away beneath the really fair and precious gifts found at Apollo's shrine.

570. 'with the new century.' The thirteenth. Browning probably meant this to be taken broadly. The poem makes Sordello a child at the disturbance at Vicenza, the historical date of which is 1194, and makes him thirty years of age at the entrapment of Richard at Ferrara, the historical date of which is 1224. But if we accept 1194 as his birth date, the year of Frederick's excommunication (1227) will fall beyond his lifetime.

572. 'the abysm.' The Ottoman power was harassing the Byzantine Empire.

574. 'that Pisan pair.' The first of the pair is evidently (l. 575) Niccola Pisano (c. 1206-1278), sculptor and architect, whose baptistery at Pisa and pulpit in the Cathedral at Siena are still admired. The second can scarcely be Guidone, and is no doubt Giovanni Pisano, the son and apt pupil of Niccola.

576. 'is Guidone set.' In the church of S. Domenico at Siena there is a picture of the Virgin and Child enthroned. Some hold that the work, though it bears this painter's name (with some letters erased), is too good to have been done at so early a period (1221, which is also marked on the picture).

583. 'worth.' Befall: Ger. *werden*.

590. 'pyx.' (Lat. *buxus*, the box-tree.) Here simply 'box.' In the R.C. Church it is the box in which the consecrated host is kept. It is also the name given to the box which contains the sample coins at the Mint.

593. 'colleagues.' Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (161-180), the philosophic Roman Emperor, who has left us his *Meditations*, associated with himself as colleague Lucius Verus, a weak and vicious youth.

597. 'and out there curled.' The Romans stormed Seleucia, whence they carried off the image of the Cumæan Apollo, which they placed in their own city. "But it is said that, after this statue was carried off, and the city was burnt, the soldiers, searching the temple, found a narrow hole, and when this was opened in the hope of finding something of value in it, from some

deep gulf, which the science of the Chaldæans had closed up, issued a pestilence, which, in the time of Verus and Marcus Antoninus, polluted the whole world, from the borders of Persia to the Rhine and Gaul, with contagion and death." (*Ammianus Marcellinus*, Bk. XXIII. ch. vi.)

603. 'the Loxian.' The name was given to Apollo from his ambiguous (λοξός) oracles, or from his interpreting (λέγειν) the mind of Zeus. The 'choicest gifts of gold' probably means Sordello's splendid natural endowments.

## Ll. 604-671.

*Sordello's imagination performs extraordinary feats on external nature.*

604-625. Sordello's little world of space.

We turn again, therefore, to the story of Sordello's early days. As far back as he could remember, he had lived at Goito (the secret residence of the Tuscan Adelaide), and there his youth glided quietly away—the castle, with its border of fir-forest and its surrounding range of low mountains, making up all the world he knew. Enjoying himself at will, he would wander everywhere except in the northern part of the building. This, for some mysterious reason, he was forbidden to visit, and he obeyed the injunction so far as not to go beyond the corridors, the vault where the maidens lingered in their penance, the maple chamber, a few odd corners, and the breezy parapet looking toward Mantua. From some very old foreign women-servants, who waited upon him, he learned all he knew of the busy troubled world that lay but a short distance off beyond the neighbouring hills.

626-671. His unbounded realm of fancy.

For a time life was one delight to Sordello in this drowsy Paradise. With its activities of imagination and its close in sleep, each day brought its tribute of fresh enchantments, and he was ready to welcome every morrow when it dawned. As the great palmer-worm, having eaten the life out of luscious plants, puts forth wings when autumn makes these wither, and goes after

new delights, so Sordello never halted in the progress of his pleasures. The infantine fancies which his imagination flung in profusion on some discovery wreathed themselves luxuriously around it; and there was no monotony, for these fancies flitted quickly from one object to another. "A fickle king," the things his imagination ruled over must have thought him, since, after stocking one of them with intellect and feeling till he could hold communion with it as with a companion, he would suddenly abandon it for another, which he would endow, not only with new qualities created for itself, but with those of his latest favourite. Thus, as his imagination wrought upon them, the objects of his upland home gained or lost their glory, the fancies of a day entirely changing them, as the hoar-frost of a night makes familiar things look grotesque. And, mad burlesque as the whole thing appears, it was serious to him. Just think! After he had seen a party of archers ride along the vines, and their chief had left them in order to mount to those solitary northern chambers to which Sordello never went, the orpine patch that had come to blossom that very day was turned into the chief, with the rest of the plant as his retinue! Thus one thing after another was laid hold of. His imagination reached the most unlikely objects; and as the spider, making light of distance, shoots her threads from barbican to battlement, so, in his life's invigorating morn, this spinner of day-dreams, himself always the centre, flung far and wide his fresh and lovely fancies.

**657-663. A specimen of his imagination's work.**

615. 'a mysterious interdict.' He was forbidden to enter the north part because in it, as we shall see, Adelaide occasionally received Taurello Salinguerra, from whom she wished to hide the youth.

657. 'the orpine patch.' Or *livelong*. It "has a stout perennial rootstock, from which a number of stout annual stems arise, about two feet high. The leaves are broad, egg-shaped or oblong, mostly concave, with large blunt teeth. The rosy or pale purple flowers have five petals," &c. The *stonecrop*, of the same genus (*sedum*), "presents a fine sight when in flower, the large spread-

ing patches being completely covered with the golden stars." No doubt this applies generally to the *orpine* also. (Step's *Wayside and Woodland Blossoms*, First Series.)

660. 'the Chief.' Taurello Salinguerra.

663. 'thrall.' This seems to mean an object enthralled by his imagination.

667. 'barbican.' A watch-tower over the gateway.

## Ll. 672-697.

*The world is powerless to break Sordello's day-dreams; for he is closely sheltered from its care and pain.*

672-684. The world soon breaks most youthful day-dreams.

This world has made a quiet compact with itself to sweep away, either gradually or at one blow, such a web of fancies as Sordello wove; but it failed to get its way with him, because at Goito he was carefully guarded from care and pain. These are what best nourish judgment — that prosaic expedient which we, less protected from life's rules, are glad to adopt and force to help us when the wide promise of youthful imagination fails — by the exercise of which we take two or three joys that lie within our reach, concentrate ourselves upon them, and, giving them a new relative value, render them, perhaps, worth most of those we must forego. But there was nothing whatever to administer a shock to Sordello's self-centred dreams. And suppose he was selfish enough, without the feeblest moral sense; what might he have been had others been near to claim a share in his joys? Or might he not have been different had a kindly chance torn his web of fancies into shreds? But what was the nearest approach to tragedy at his castle-home? A heron's nest blown down by a March wind — a fawn lying dead at the foot of a precipice—a newly shot bird in the brake,— such sights as these were the saddest he could behold, and were far too slight to break his trance.

684-692. But it failed to get at Sordello.

692-697. Enter Naddo

No, friend Naddo! There's not a single point here to support your theory. Making yourself invisible, study

Sordello closely, and report if, as the years went quietly on, his 'genius'—I use your own word—dawned, as you maintain genius always does dawn, amid a great upheaval of nature.

with a mistake.

693. 'friend Naddo.' He will appear from time to time. He is the common-sense critic, with a devotion to men of genius and a great desire to 'run' them successfully.

'Eat fern-seed.' Which makes one invisible, like the fairies.

695. 'with throes and stings.' Of the man's soul, or of outward nature?

## Ll. 698-716.

*But the passing of time does for Sordello what the world has failed to do, and he learns that his fancies are not realities.*

698-709. Time destroys Sordello's fancies, and he sees natural objects as they really are.

What the world could not do in Sordello's case was accomplished by time. With long opportunity of studying the things around him, he managed to get to the heart of their nature and to learn how it was related to his own. The result was that he found himself companionless amid the wild-wood sights at Goito. As if the poppy felt with him!—though he had lived in its flaring, mocking red till the autumn rains spoiled it and left it a bare, brown, rattling skull. The idea that natural objects were conscious of his greatness was gone.

709-716. May these objects not suffice to his enjoyment?

Yet why, because the enchantment thrown over them by his imagination had passed away, should they cease to interest him and be abandoned? They might not be what they once were; but surely, though they could no longer yield him the communion that had thrown him into ecstasy, their presence might still afford some pleasure. Though he took away from the poppy those gifts of thought and feeling with which he had enriched it, there remained the poppy itself, a flower with colour for the eye: he could still receive a certain amount of joy from it through his bodily senses.

707. 'their fleering.'

> "You speak to Casca; and to such a man
> That is no fleering tell-tale."
> —*Julius Cæsar*, Act I. sc. iii.

708. 'crane.' Greek κρανίον, κάρα, 'head.'
'rattling.' With the seeds inside.

## Ll. 717-806.

*The actual beauties of Nature will not satisfy Sordello now: no longer king over tree and flower, he would be the centre of an admiring crowd of men.*

717-729. Sordello cannot be satisfied with anything not conscious of him.

"There is little advantage," says judgment, which has arisen to banish his day-dreams, "in beholding other creatures' attributes if you have none yourself." If Sordello hesitates, feeling that intercourse with the disenchanted forms of nature may satisfy him well enough, judgment entices him by saying: "Would it not be much better, at any rate, if you had some office, peculiarly your own, to discharge?" That is a large proposal, Sordello thinks. "Well, then," continues judgment, "justify yourself for this ignoble wish to reduce the number of your pleasures, of which imagination provided a great host out of the scenery around you, and limit them to that scenery with the old enchantment gone. What is there outside of you now that you should seek such limitation? Even when the spell of your imagination lay upon these outer objects, there was within you a lurking doubt whether passive interest was enough for you — whether you were yourself any the better of tasting the joy of flower and leaf as you conceived it—and how much less there is now in these disenchanted objects to content you? You must have a function of your own."

730-739. Love, which

Alas! For what would Sordello use his powers, or discharge his office? If a man have some object of

affection, he will serve it without regard to the world's opinion. Throughout its course love knows what it wants, and, being its own proof, can have no misgivings. It is shy, too, and cannot bear that a crowd, which understands not, should look upon it; while its inability to do any worthy service to what it worships only makes it stronger and causes it to exalt its idol far above itself, as it wishes it to be. Souls like Sordello, on the contrary, being baffled and put to shame in one way, but retaining the same conceptions, with self always the centre, take comfort in a kind of dim though perfect satisfaction with their own endowments, yet tremble lest these should lack the admiration of a crowd. They must have others applaud them to themselves. "Vanity," Naddo tells you.

draws forth a man's powers, is shy.

740-747. But the self-centred soul seeks only self-display.

Whence, now, is Sordello to bring forth his crowd? From the half-dead old serving-women of Goito and the archers he had seen march to it with their chief? His imagination set to work, and there rose up before him not only the embroidered warriors and the girls of the stone font—not only Adelaide (who was sitting double over a scroll, with one maiden at her knees, that evening when, as he stumbled upon them through the arras, his soul shook with fear, so terrible the meagre lady looked as, her eyes—and the maiden's too—bluer than usual with surprise, she started up from amid quaint robes and weird perfumes) — but the whole outside world. Whatever had been pictured to him by scraps of song and story as the offices of men, and, no single one of these being counted sufficient to take a whole man to itself, had been showered in a heap on tree and flower —such offices now stood forth separate from one another. Strong men, wise men, gracious men were evolved, and a stream of at least lifelike figures poured through his brain; so that, ere he was well aware of it, he was surrounded with abundant human material on which to work his pleasure.

747-770. Sordello's imagination collects a crowd.

But how is he to fix the gaze of all upon himself?

771-809. How will he fix their gaze upon himself?

Are they simply to show, along with the thunder or a dove's brood-song, upon what things he who has called them together has pleasure in meditating? Is each of them to live his own life, enjoy some peculiar bliss, stand alone in something in which, loving it most, he excels—something far worthier of being tried than anything Sordello envies in tree and flower—and take no notice of him? Far from it! No simple and self-evident delights, such as will serve ordinary men, will suffice him. He must have all kinds of far-reaching desires, and qualities in new and strange combination, and in new and strange contrast,—qualities the very variety of which might be irksome, but which would all be recognised in him, one here, another there, by the company he has suddenly got together; he must possess whatever love is prized by any individual in his crowd, so that the crowd will prize the wonderful amount of different loves it sees accumulated in him.

780-786. In him each man is to recognise his own most cherished quality.

786-806. So he must accept many different tastes.

Once let Sordello care because such men as he has gathered together estimate this or that to be a joy—once let him allow that other people's recognition of a thing as valuable proves it so—and his crowd will vamp him counterfeits enough: if only their print be on the coin, the mint attests that it is gold, and those to whom he makes his new appeal pronounce it good. And if the stamp they put upon a thing—if their choosing to call it good—only put a fair appearance on strange, ungainly, wearisome qualities, which he has lived without and never felt the want of, what does it matter? Anything any man cares for most must be his also.

So must words work out the meaning of the half-smile, half-sigh, with which Sordello, who lately could not get enough of woodland sights, betakes himself to study eagerly whatever those of his puppets his crude fancy supposes most notable—such as popes, kings, priests, knights—are pleased to declare most worthy of being sought after: he accepts all their artificial joys, not because they really appeal to him, but because, taking

upon him the form of pope, of king, of priest, of knight, he will be able to estimate the attributes of each.

717. 'answered.' With this argument between the soul and a quality within it, compare, in Milton's sonnet—

> "'Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?'
> I fondly ask. But patience, to prevent
> That murmur, soon replies——"

726. 'effects it.' The 'ignoble wish.'
'proves.' The subject is 'what from without.'
727. 'trouble spared.' The nominative absolute construction.
728. 'That.' Supply 'proves' before it.
741. 'put to shame.' As Sordello has been by losing his empire over the objects of nature.
746. 'before a crowd.' However great a man's powers may be, his life will be a failure if he has nothing he loves and devotes them to, and aims at self-display. Without love, indeed, a man is really without 'an office' or 'a function.' See Bk. VI., l. 57.
In this passage (ll. 730-747) Browning has raised the lid of the pyx (l. 590).
751. 'Adelaide.' Like the old women, the archers, and the 'one maiden at her knees,' she was in the flesh.
752. 'one maiden.' Palma.

## Ll. 806-855.

*And, in order to be the admired centre of all, Sordello would excel each man in his most excellent qualities.*

On the attributes of all the men he fancies most notable he will spend himself; he will be all that the best of them are in endowment. Nay, he will excel them in their strong points; else the whole thing were a mockery, since he would not be the centre of all and draw their admiring gaze. He thinks, for example, of the chieftain, Ecelin da Romano (who told him that Ecelin had been made Imperial Vicar?). "How does my life excel his? Does he turn in his tent with the easy abandon of a strong and fearless man? Well, if he does, I bend my head to enjoy delicious rest among the

**806-818. His imagination's comparisons are satisfactory.**

stone maidens of the font. What if he stalks through the Trentine Pass? An hour ago I climbed yon steep with little toil—I am as strong as he. But can I, too, foil the stabber hired by the Guelfs to kill me—baffle his treason in an offhand manner with one skilful turn of my sword, and show the crowd at St Mark's something to admire?" Here there was no rescue from hard fact. If, no longer a poppy, he is really Ecelin's equal, his hand, of course, must be as strong as Ecelin's, and should be able to wield a mighty sword with his success; and that he could try here and now. He did try, but he soon had enough of the heavy weapon he lifted, as it was too much for his strength. Quickly he returned from earth to the moon—from fact to fancy—left each abortive boyish attempt for imagination's feats, which never fail. "But I'll manage it some day," he says to himself; "these people I picture are older than I—are they not all grown up? Besides, at present my excellence in all their qualities is only a dream, but one day I may find an instrument whereby to express my grand ideals. Given time, my soul will shape me such a body as will act out all my desire." So might one express the youth's chagrin and resignation over another actual attempt he made, and the hope that crept in when he let the rough ash-bow sink from his aching wrist. Then he imagines himself on a crusade. Leaping from fact to fancy, he hears his golden arrow hiss through the air and sees it strike Malek down splendidly. This gives the besiegers their chance. "Crusaders to the breach! The Holy City is won back for God!" Since such things would some day be, why should he trouble now with depressing actualities?

818-831. But a test case in fact

831-843. Drives him back on imagination.

844-855. Imagination is to be his school of preparation for life's performances.

Thus Sordello lives, not careless as before, when his life was in tree and flower, yet not without comfort. He is busy preparing for the future. He is rehearsing what he will say and do when fate has prepared real men of fame, like Este on the Guelf side and Ecelin, lord of his own home, to offer him worship, with real

places enormously celebrated, like Mantua, Verona, and Rome, to witness the offering. Surely time so spent will not be lost! Rather is it a good thing that, before trying to act them out, he should form his estimate of distinguished human qualities, gathered from all those, far and near, that displayed them—that he should sift them and keep the best—and that he should compress the most brilliant into one great excelling star, even his glorious self!

809. 'more entirely.' This seems to belong to the words 'be men.' While blending with them, he must excel them; otherwise there would be little self-display.

818. 'can I, too, foil.' Before Otho IV., in 1209, Ecelin II. declared that, while they were walking together on the square of St Mark's, Azzo VI. had him basely attacked by assassins, and held up his arm to prevent him from defending himself, and that he would certainly have been killed had he not violently torn himself away from the traitor. (Sismondi, *Hist. des Rép. Ital.*, ch. xiii.)

841. 'Malek.' A general name for a Saracen chief. The word is the same as the Hebrew for 'king.'

## Ll. 855-927.

*Sordello's imagination 'heightens him up' till he becomes Apollo, the god of many attributes.*

Accordingly the pageant of characters Sordello's imagination had called into his presence became gradually smaller. Like wind, his spirit went through their ranks to winnow them. The less brilliant phantasms falling away, none but the strong, the wise, the beautiful remained; and so the process of sifting went on till two or three gathered up in themselves all that most beseems men, and at last gave all their grace and strength to build up a single shape, even himself, under whose potency every creature would be brought. Will he be such as Frederick, of whom the bowman talk so much? Straightway his imagination turns him into the Emperor.

**855-864.** Sordello makes a careful selection of attributes he is to display.

**865-878.** The Emperor Frederick

Grape-juice he happens to look at becomes Saracenic wine which he drinks with the Miramoline, and clusters of filberts near him become dates plucked from the bough which John Brienne has sent to remind the sluggish imperial army of Canaan. It is exactly Frederick's pomp and fierce demeanour that Sordello exhibits in his imagined position.

Is improved upon.

But he excels the Kaiser, whose authority must be supported by threats and violence. Rarely will anything harsh be seen or heard where Sordello sits serene; for his look or his lightest word will irresistibly draw the most stubborn into obedience. His right arm is indeed clothed with thunder, but where is the need of his using his awful power? The angriest mood of the multitude is quieted by the lovely songs he sings —songs that rise up in strength, then float over it hither and thither, like an escape of angels.

878-893. And Eglamor the minstrel is wrought in.

And in this idea about singing he is working another figure into himself. The tune, and most of the words, by which his imagination holds the multitude spell-bound, he has heard crooned by the old serving-women of Goito, the face of each as she sang lighting with a smile, as lights the face of a worn-out queen when some remind her of the love-tales of her girlhood. "Eglamor made that!" they tell him. So he was minstrel-emperor. As he sat head over all, nothing but outrageously ugly characters could vex him, and these he killed out of hand. Other men he easily subdued by his look so divine and his tones so sweet, and graciously promoted to thrones beneath his own.

893-927. His imagination at last 'heightens him up' into Apollo.

But why should we labour the matter in attempting to give a new name to an old idea of bliss, instead of saying that Sordello, like many before him, had discovered Apollo,—had concluded that he was the being of perfect attributes, and set above all others? And bid me not continue to explain, as I began to do when telling how he built on Frederick and Eglamor, what attributes of different characters he pieced together

wherewith to clothe himself—what thefts from all lands and ages contributed to deck out the array in which his fancy clothed him when, in the depth of June, as he climbed some narrow ravine amid the clatter made by its millions of bright pebbles, over which the swollen water slipped with a singing noise, he dipped his foot into the stream, yet, as one might have imagined from his look, went along dry-shod though his feet really trod on the runnel's very bed. The vines were his roof, the lime-trees were his wall, while some short-lived damsel-fly flittered before and over him. And, coming forth from the ravine, he spied great slopes of forest, where the myrtle-trees multiplied tuft on tuft and the maples grew at their ease. As if proud of him who looked upon it, the wood tried to work surprises upon him as it had worked them in earlier days. Now it stood up like a dead, black barrier (because a cloud was over it), so thick that the smallest animal could not creep through; yet in a moment (the cloud passing away) each shapeless clump was changed into a clearly outlined shrub, and what had seemed oak-boles diminished to ilex-stems. For hours Sordello was pleased to make believe that the wood was consciously performing for his amusement; and when at last white summer-lightning hung aloft, and the whole palpitating breast of heaven sank and rose in well-timed measure, it was nature pressing to the worship of him, Apollo.

868. 'Miramoline.' The Mahometan ruler of Morocco. Certain friars who went there to convert his people were at first treated with forbearance, but they insisted on becoming martyrs. (*Life of St Francis*, by Paul Sabatier, ch. xiii.)

871. 'the bough.' Is it in history?

881. 'while songs go up.' Cp. Bk. III., l. 593.

900. 'purfle.' Embroider. Robert Henryson (*Preaching of the Swallow*) speaks of flowers which

> "Phœbus, with his golden bemis gent,
> Has purfellit, and painted pleasandlie."

907. 'crenelled.' Fr. *créneler*, from Low Latin *crena*, 'a notch.' It seems impossible to take the word as here meaning 'embrasured.'

909. 'damsel-fly.' "The slender dragon-fly Agrion Virgo, and kindred species, called in French demoiselle." (*Oxford New English Dictionary.*)

## Ll. 927-962.

*Palma, daughter of Ecelin II., becomes Sordello's Daphne.*

**927-936.** Sordello has the loves of many maidens.

As time goes on, all that is unpleasant perishes from Sordello's realms of imagination, and the notables from whom he gathered his attributes sink down, while celebrated more and more faintly in his songs, to an attitude of becoming reverence. Only the maidens of his dream-world are slow to leave him in unapproachable majesty. He has won their hearts in turn, some of them loving him passionately at once, others having first to tear away earlier affections or to overcome a feeling of reserve, and even of disdain, but coming sooner or later to adore him. But he must have one whom he chiefly loves—his Daphne. Who will this be? "Count Richard of Verona," the faded old serving-women tell him, "seeks to wed our Palma. If we grant her to him, we secure in return Richard's voice on our side in the counsels of Azzo of Este, and that will help us as much as Taurello's fighting." The Palma they speak of is the only child of Agnes of Este, of whom Ecelin II. was enamoured years ago, before this Tuscan Adelaide wedded him and made him wicked. "But Palma will not have Count Richard," the sleepy old servants proudly add. Here, surely, is Sordello's Daphne! The maid who despises all other suitors will be most deserving of Apollo's love. So Palma became conspicuous in his world of dreams. His imagination would picture her rising from her forest-couch. How the glory of her golden hair winds itself about her, the very ground bright, as with spilt sunbeams, with the reflection of its tresses! One leg, doubled underneath, has its small foot buried in her dimpled, snowy flesh, while she

**936-948.** Palma becomes his Daphne.

**948-962.** He sees her rising from her forest-couch.

remains poised, but the other swings listlessly below, feeling for cool air, the vein-streaks swelling to a richer violet where the languid blood lies heavily—her body yet resting calm on the slight support of her outspread palms as though suspended in the act of rising by her consciousness of beauty—a consciousness that makes her turn with a look so frankly triumphant, because she knows that Apollo watches her from the pine-trees' gloom.

928. 'the Pythons.' The story of the birth of the monster Python, and of his slaughter by Apollo beside the 'fair-flowing spring' at the foot of Mount Parnassus, is told in the 'Homeric' *Hymn to Apollo.*

932. 'Delians.' The maidens of Delos, where Apollo was born. Their wonderful singing in praise of him and Leto and Artemis, in which all their voices rose as the voice of one, is recorded in the *Hymn.* They were "a great wonder, the fame of which will never die."

938. 'Daphne.' The nymph beloved of Apollo, and, at her own request, changed into a bay-tree to escape his pursuit.

939. 'as good for Este's ends.' Ironical.

940. 'as our Taurello.' Who hated the House of Este, and was always aiming at its overthrow.

942. 'of Agnes Este.' Historically, Palma was the daughter of Ecelin II. and Adelaide. (Rolandini Chronicon in Muratori's *Scriptores Rerum Italicarum.*)

## Ll. 962-1000.

*Time is slow to give Sordello opportunities of translating his imaginations into real life.*

962-969. Sordello has to wait long for his stage of real life.

The worst of it is that time passes quickly; for Sordello has reached the age for action — is he not now grown up?—and fate is slow in giving him the hoped-for stage of real life whereon to perform, and the hoped-for crowd of real admirers to witness his performance. He grows lean and pale, not doing anything, but ever busy with his fancies. These are scarcely suffi-

cient for him now, but, longing to act them out, he finds himself still alone at Goito. And so things might have remained for ever, since no visitors came about the castle, and he remained unnoticed. At last Taurello leaves Mantua, and Adelaide flits back thither from Goito. Strange that, whenever Taurello is in the city, she should be found at Goito. Is it because she distrusts him? By no means. They are strong on the same side. They try to make Ecelin still work for the Ghibelline party; and the House of Romano is daily growing in strength, Azzo of Este being inactive, and Richard of Verona, in the hope of wedding Palma, wavering in his support of the Guelfs. They feel that, if only Frederick would visit Lombardy, it would make their success complete. Let him come and provide material for the songs of minstrels from the Court in Sicily, who could be tempted to leave it and tell the people of the north of the brilliant life at Messina; and let his praises, thus sung, flow along like two streams of wine to refresh the country—one going northward to Provence, the other southward to the Isle. What a plan this was—to let minstrels become the recorders of current events! Taurello devised it, though others adopted it. The Troubadour celebrates the marvellous exploits of the Emperor, and the Trouvères, taking up the tale, carry it around, so that the Formidable House of Hohenstauffen becomes famous over all the land. It was not distrust, therefore, that made Adelaide shut herself up at Goito when Taurello appeared in Mantua. Well, he leaves the city, and the games there, which had been stopped by her absence at the castle, begin again now that she is back; and from this circumstance sprang an accident that broke in upon Sordello's mingled content and dissatisfaction, and opened his eyes, as with a flash, to the real life of men.

**969-994.** Why is Adelaide always at Goito when Taurello is at Mantua?

**994-1000.** Adelaide's games, resumed at Mantua, are fraught with destiny for Sordello.

973. 'disburthened of a care.' Because she has prevented Taurello Salinguerra from meeting Sordello.

975. 'Is it distrust.' Is it that she does not wish to meet him

in Mantua? The lines following represent the general popular opinion, though there were not lacking reports of Taurello's inclination to break away. (Bk. II., l. 351.)

980. 'its young Kaiser's.' Frederick II. was King of the Two Sicilies, which came to him through the marriage of his father, Henry VI., with Constance, queen of these realms.

981. 'To sing us . . . up.' To 'crack up' in song.

989. 'Trouvères.' In *Sordello* this word is used to denote much the same as 'Jongleurs.' Naddo becomes Sordello's trouvère (Bk. III., l. 222), as he was first to Eglamor (Bk. II., l. 82); and what that meant appears from Bk. II., l. 67, and other passages. The trouvères were really the minstrels of Northern France, as the troubadours were of Italy and Provence.

'the miracle.' Evidently the troubadours' performance, in reporting the 'cunning' of which the trouvères would communicate its subject-matter—the glories of the Imperial House.

998. 'mixed content.' Sordello was delighted with his conceptions, but disappointed at not having found a stage for their display.

# BOOK THE SECOND.

## Ll. 1-41.

*Sordello, in pursuit of the visioned Palma, is led on through the woods to Mantua, where a scene of actual life in the outer world, with the real Palma, bursts upon his view.*

1-26. Sordello pursues the visioned Palma through Goito's wood,

THE snow was gone at last. Beeches were putting forth their pink buds and the larches were donning their delicate green. "It was," said Eglamor, "as if the year were a witch who, after lying buried in the woods all winter, had used incantations to make herself young and fair again, and the fine green of the larches were the smoke rising from her cauldron and blending with the black pines." This, by the way, was a fancy that brought upon the troubadour a rebuke from Naddo, who warned him against setting up such conceits instead of describing nature as she really is. On this spring morning, then, Sordello wandered forth from Goito with the feeling strong upon him that, ere it drew to a close, he would secure Palma, the lady of his dreams. Surely he need only pass over yon mound, where the grass has not yet revived, and through that brake, where the rising sun turns the stalks of the withered ferns to gold, into the forest-walks and take her! With dew from the ferns bordering these paths besprinkling his brow, he goes forward till he reaches the great morass, which lies before him all bright and steaming, and filled with living

26-38. And Mincio's marsh,

things; while all the time the form of his imagination's lady quivers far off in the coloured mist or comes between him and the flying herons. Cautiously he went, for, though the river Mincio was falling from its flood, it had not drained the neighbouring ground; so that the crystal water would burst up as he walked, and a pond form around his feet if he but stopped to pick a flower or to touch the creatures of the marsh that swarmed about his path. The pursuit will not last long, he thinks. Palma will pass out from the next wood to find herself face to face with a great crowd, and then she will openly own she loves him, with Boniface at hand to hear her confession and give up all hope of winning her. Only a thin line of pines to penetrate——

Suddenly Mantua appears. Round its walls is gathered a crowd indeed, but one composed of real men and women, gaily dressed and talking loud. He stood rooted to the spot.

**38-41. And strikes a bit of the untried outer world.**

## Ll. 41-55.

*No homage is offered to Sordello on this his first appearance, yet he finds reason to believe that fulfilment is beginning to touch his dreams.*

Standing thus in the midst of actual life, Sordello is grieved to realise that his prophetic dreams of homage from the world are utterly unfulfilled. His youth is now in its prime, and he, born to be adored, is unnoticed in a crowd, and feels helpless to compete with real men in any of their pursuits. Yet there was a tingling feeling within him as he stood thus forlorn. Were he only to take the trouble to learn the trick of this trade or of that, he would be able to make his mark. But the feeling counted for nothing, and immediately passed away: to learn to do one thing that was done by other men would be to place himself on their level and, by so

**41-51. Sordello receives no homage.**

limiting his attributes and energies, to cease to be Apollo. But listen! Was the imagination that this day's wandering would lead him to Palma's feet so vain! Her name is rising from the crowd, and here may be the beginning of the fulfilment of all his dreams!

51-53. But feels there is still hope for his prophecies.

Ah, Sordello! Beware of having anything to do with real life. Your contact with it will be fraught with infinite disappointment, weariness, and pain. Rather than touch it, steal aside and die amid your cherished imaginations.

53-55. Browning's warning 'aside.'

48. 'a sleight—a trick.' No other interpretation seems possible. He looks upon the gay crowd of minstrels, and something tells him he could do better than any of them if he only learned a few rules of the craft; but at once he dismisses the feeling, since to be a professional minstrel would be a poor affair for one who expected to do all kinds of exploits out of hand.

55. 'And this—abjure.' Sordello's great error lay in his not entering heartily into some pursuit of real life. This means that his expectation of using real life for self-display was doomed to disappointment.

## Ll. 55-122.

*At the Mantuan Court of Love the Troubadour Eglamor is thoroughly defeated by Sordello, who is appointed Palma's minstrel in his stead.*

55-78. Eglamor's lay

The curtains of the pavilion were drawn, and Sordello knew that Palma was there. Presently, he thought, there will appear some strong and graceful knight,—such an one as in his imagination he had pictured himself as destined to be—most likely Boniface himself.

But in the showy man that advanced and was welcomed with glad cries from the crowd, which settled down to hear him, Sordello saw there was nothing princely. It was the best Troubadour of Boniface, as the Jongleurs' shouts explained, and his lay was to close the Court of Love. Obsequious Naddo, his attendant trouvère, strung the minstrel's lute with the new string 'Elys,' so called from the subject of the coming song;

and the minstrel, watching this preparation, stood biting his lips to keep down his smile of pride. Then he began to sing. Sordello was wildly excited, for he recognised what the song was intended to represent, and could supply what, the singer, hurrying too much in his enthusiasm, and not fully grasping his own tale, was omitting. Why! was not the story about Sordello himself—about what he had lived through in imagination at Goito? And how poor the passion with which this man told of the beloved one! Eglamor had scarcely ceased, and the people's applause was only half-done, ere Sordello had gained his side, and, in spite of angry twitchings from the minstrel's friend Naddo, had begun his version of the song. Rapid and vivid and rich, his lay flew on, though it could go barely quickly enough to express the ideas that pursued one another in his brain. Naddo, who had interfered with this marvellous performer, fell back aghast, like some Egyptian who, when the bull he has tormented turns round upon him bellowing, sees a scarab beneath its tongue, and knows it is the sacred animal. But the people's feelings were of unmingled delight: they shouted, and pressed about Sordello, and he knew he had gained some prize. While this homage was sinking him into a trance of joy, a sight withheld him for a time: there, at the knees of Adelaide, sat the very maid on whom he had suddenly set eyes in the North Chamber of Goito. This, then, was Palma! A lock of her hair touched his cheek as, bending over him, she said a word or two, and laid on him her own scarf, warm from her neck. Then, delirious joy working in his brain again, the whole scene was hidden from his eyes, and he was conscious of nothing until, home at Goito, he wakened up to find the place the same, but himself—crowned! Palma's scented scarf was on his neck. A gorgeous dress lay near: is it some prize? He turned inquiringly to the old attendants of the castle, who, explaining how the jongleurs had brought him back, remarked how strange it was that his lonely

**78-88.** Is rendered incomparably better by Sordello,

**88-105.** Who is rewarded by Palma.

**105-122.** He falls into a trance, and awakens to fame.

childhood had been spent in the acquisition of so splendid a power of song, with such promotion in it; for Eglamor was dead with spite, and he was Palma's minstrel.

57. 'the proper You.' A prince who would answer Sordello's brilliant conception of what a prince should be, but who yet, of course, would be in real life excelled by Sordello once he began to perform.

65. 'the Jongleurs.' They were in attendance on the troubadours, whose rhymes they often recited, and sometimes imitated in compositions of their own. According to one instructor, the jongleur "must play on the tambourine and the cymbals, and make the symphony resound. To throw and catch little balls, on the point of a knife; to imitate the song of birds; to play tricks, with the basket; to exhibit attacks of castles, and leaps (no doubt, of monkeys) through four hoops," &c., are necessary accomplishments. Sismondi's *Literature of Europe* (ch. v.-viii.), from which this extract is taken (Roscoe's trans.), gives an account of the troubadours and trouvères.

77. 'that Elys.' "Elys, then," says Browning, "is merely the ideal subject, with such a name, of Eglamor's poem, and referred to in other places as his (Sordello's) type of perfection, realised according to his faculty. (El-lys—the lily.)" (Berdoe's *Browning Cyclopædia.*)

89. 'the harassed bull.' One of the marks of the bull destined to be the god Apis was the shape of a beetle marked upon its tongue.

115. 'A prize?' The dress of the Court-minstrel.

121. 'dead with spite.' They were quite out there (l. 242, &c.)

## Ll. 122-169.

*Sordello seeks the cause of his marvellous success in song.*

**122-136. What Sordello had done with Eglamor's lay.**

Hitherto Sordello had done nothing but imagine; now, light of heart with his success, he began to think. Surely a discovery would arise out of this song-triumph! For a week he meditated sweetly on that day's experience, from the beginning of Eglamor's song to his own trance. Here was something strange. What had he done? He had taken the same subject, but had given it better expression, had filled in some essentials and

missed out what was without significance for the story. Doubtless he had vastly improved the tale. But had he ever thought about the singing itself? He was full of the vision of Elys, and he never turned aside to see whether he sang beautifully about her or not—though, to be sure, giving expression to one part of his vision had led him to new fancies about her, as a falling cone may draw one's eye up to the dove's nest in the tree-top.

137-147. He had taken no pleasure in the song for its own sake.

Now, if his hearers had fancies, why did they applaud the mere expression of them? Is it possible that they have no fancies and find the song so very beautiful in itself? "Well," continued Sordello, "if they, having never beheld her, love my couple of rhymes about Elys as these are loved by me, for whom they only express what I have seen and felt, and who love the praise only because I know what is praised, it is wonderful indeed! I must be a god to them!

147-160. Did his hearers find it so lovely in itself?

"Or what if men like Eglamor have made the praise of song fashionable and their hearers worship what they do not understand or really enjoy?

161-165. Or was their applause conventional?

"Or, again, have the hearers fancies slow and dim, which song, by expressing them, strengthens and makes clear?"

165-169. Or did his song make their own dim fancies clear?

124. 'a discovery grew.' The 'indirect speech' of 'a discovery grows,' used with a future meaning.

157. 'who have run These fingers.' In the experience of keen imagination.

164. 'And worship what they know not.' Like the Samaritans, and readers of a certain poet.

## Ll. 169-192.

*Eglamor is carried to his burial.*

169-183. The dead Eglamor is borne to Goito wood.

In the midst of his meditations Sordello one day heard a low, dreary chant and the sound of approaching footsteps in the wood beside Goito. So calm it was

that the trees were almost motionless. The noonday sun being clouded, the half-closed flowers were fluttering in the gentle breeze—"like a Roman bride," as Eglamor would have put it, "when the cold little spear is inserted in her hair." And indeed it is Eglamor whom these men precede on the way to his long home. It would be good, Naddo thought, to get him laid to rest far from Mantua, the scene of his defeat in minstrelsy; and it is Naddo that heads the jongleurs and trouvères of the procession—a scant company, to tell the truth; for Eglamor's popularity was gone, his worshippers being put to shame by his defeat, and his best friends being almost weary of him. Death, however, had softened them toward the poor singer, but even Naddo was no longer a devotee. "Let us only get through the dirge I have composed for the occasion, and make for home again," he said.

**183-192. His was a timely end.**

178. 'the Sabine dart.' A little spear (*hasta*) was inserted in the bride's hair. 'That famous rape' is the rape of the Sabine women by the early Romans, with whom wives were scant. Some historians assert that the story of the rape was invented to explain the custom referred to.

## Ll. 192-273.

*Browning pauses to contrast Eglamor, whose poetry was the fruit of effort, and who, as appeared even in his defeat, loved his art for its own sake, with Sordello, and shows the manner of his death.*

**192-206. Eglamor's poetry was the fruit of toil; Sordello's, a spontaneous outburst.**

This Eglamor had been the opposite of Sordello. He had gone through much work and long waiting to attain his poetic ideas, even as a worshipper goes through many a rite ere the veil of the shrine is drawn aside and the sanctities are revealed. His fancies had come in answer to patient thinking and practice, and he had fixed them in certain rhymes. These, as he sung them, could bring the fancies into the midst of his life; and

though, when he ceased to sing, they did not remain with him as part and parcel of his soul, he could repeat the songs when he would, and bring himself solace and rest. So much did he reverence these poetic ideas that, when his singing came to an end, and he loosed them, as it were, from the bonds of his rhymes, he did so with a sense of awe, such as Perseus felt when he loosed the naked Andromeda from the rock. No rare genius was he, pouring himself forth at will in fire or wave or air, but rather a poor earth-spirit, who, by laboriously rearranging a few materials, reaches the full satisfaction of his aims.

206-219. Eglamor reverenced his fancies: Sordello's were familiarly his own.

Then, how he loved his art! It marked him as a man apart. He valued it for its own sake; and thus, though having less of this world's goods than any other bard, he was little concerned about popular applause or popular neglect, since he had this great treasure, while other men must needs be content with hollow things like pomp and wealth and power. To be first in anything is a pride and joy. In the night, when other birds have hid themselves away, the sorriest bat has his time of supremacy; and Eglamor, as he well knew, was noblest poet in this Mantuan corner of the earth—here, amid the woods, about which, while he walked through them with Naddo, he made little poetic conceits in order that his friend might not suppose him to be thinking of nothing but the triumph he was sure to gain at the coming performance in the city. Forgive the little weakness! No member of the guild of bards had ever made a song like his.

219-239. Eglamor loved his art: to Sordello song was nothing in itself.

You know the rest of the story—how he was exalted by his triumph at the Mantuan Court of Love that fair spring morning, was suddenly overthrown by Sordello, and died of grief. Yet so great was his genuine love of poetry that envy was dead within him ere his rival had ceased to sing. Then, for the first time in his life, he joined the applauding crowd and tried to shout—not for delight, but because he was

239-250. That love was shown even in his defeat,

now merely one of the common sort. Bending, like the rest, before Sordello, he placed his own crown below his, kissed the rival's hand, let one great tear fall upon it, and then joined his company of friends. He had been long enough at Sordello's side. Might not envy make him use some evil art? This was the thought of some who stood watching. "Stop!" they cried; "charm not his lips, nor craze his brain." And one who spied his crown lying below Sordello's pulled it away. "How," cried he, "can you place yours near his? You cannot touch him in the art. How splendid the verses he sang in answer to yours! Let us hear you sing them now yourself." And the poor bard, insult heaped on injury, sang them calmly. All his old friends going off to escort his victorious rival, home he went alone; and that evening he wondered what his life would be after this tremendous change. Reflecting that by the morrow he might see what plan to adopt, he fell asleep, never to awake again.

**251-261.** Which was crushing.

**261-266.** The manner of Eglamor's death.

**267-273.** Sordello's escort believes it has made a discovery!

All this his friends learned when they returned from Goito with tales of the lovely place where Sordello lived, and of his roamings among the hills and woods and vales. There no doubt, they said in their wisdom, he first thought of his song, laboured at its composition, and at last produced it as a finished work of art, to the defeat and death of Eglamor.

211. 'his naked love.' Andromeda, the daughter of King Cepheus and

> "That starred Æthiop queen that strove
> To set her beauty's praise above
> The sea-nymphs and their powers offended."

To punish Cassiopeia, Poseidon sent against the land a sea-monster, from which the oracle of Ammon promised deliverance if Andromeda were sacrificed as his prey. Chained to a rock by her father, she was rescued by Perseus.

215. 'gnome.' Readers of Browning will be interested to know that this word, which is probably derived from γνώμη, 'intelligence,' has been traced to Paracelsus.

229. 'other birds.' It may be pedantic to remark that the bat is not a bird.

231. 'nor find.' Without finding.

271. 'Wherein, no doubt, this lay.' The fact being that Sordello had never given a moment's thought to poetry as an art.

## Ll. 274-295.

*Sordello's joy of imagination is perfected at Eglamor's grave.*

As they buried Eglamor, Naddo recited his dirge. It was a poor performance; yet through it Sordello was led to an increase of joy, since it led his imagination to enter into the sense of human weakness, so that now he could go the round of men's experience. This he attained when, standing forth as the threnodist of Eglamor, he called upon the ferns to clothe his grave, and the pines to be its canopy, and prayed that his fame might live. (May we imagine that the dead one heard it, and laughed when Sordello, letting his crown rest for a time on the bard's breast, took it to himself again as a crown now fit for a poet's head?) Nor was Sordello's prayer in vain: a certain transitory flower bears the dead man's name, and brings him to the people's mind.

274-280. Sordello's new gain in joy.

281-295. His threnody.

278. 'By means of it.' Naddo's 'luckless ode,' which drew forth Sordello to live in defeat and mourning within his imagination, and to picture it so much more vividly than the trouvère. Not that Sordello's words, as we shall see, were adequate to his feeling. The historical Sordello composed a funeral eulogium on the Chevalier de Blacas, a troubadour of Aragon. (Sismondi's *Lit. of Europe*, ch. iv.)

290. 'a plant they have.' What is it? Is it really called 'Eglamor'?

## Ll. 296-461.

*Sordello, feeling that, with all his marvellous conceptions, he must be of extraordinary origin, discovers, as he believes, that he is of humble birth. He can no longer hope to become Monarch of the World through action, his body being so poorly fitted to express his soul, but he will win himself that title by means of song, which will reveal his divine fancies to men.*

**296-305.** The curtain rises on Sordello as poet.

The month of May had come. On a lovely morning Sordello lay beneath a laurel thicket, where he was made all the happier by each new sprinkle of ripest blossoms when, shed by the south wind, they gave out a fragrance fainter than that of Massic jars dug up at Baiæ. He wore robe and crown as before, but now a lute lay beside him on the turf. Sordello had answered the call to minstrelsy.

**305-320.** Why, long unwilling, he at last becomes eager to learn his origin.

A rich track of country stretched before him, while behind slept the castle of Goito, which had so long hidden him, with all his hopes and fears, from the world's eye. Till lately he had been glad not to hear anything about his birth. When, from time to time, in spite of the bright dream of his being Apollo, there had awakened within him a wretched suspicion that after all he might be found to be of no supernatural origin, he only drew his fancies closer about him to keep out what he feared. But when, on that spring morning, as he sang by the grave of Eglamor, he found himself reaching, through the power of his imagination, the heart of a weakness he had never actually experienced, he began to ask why he differed so from ordinary men; and he took no rest as long as anything of his Goito life, which had been superbly dressed in his fancy even to its least detail, remained unexplained. And here is what he heard.

When both counts of Vicenza—Azzo and Boniface—

banished the Vivaresi, their foes, the Maltraversi, reviled Ecelin as he went, and he, out of spite, fired their quarter, though Adelaide his wife, with her new-born child, was there. When the chief became terrified at the rage of the populace, and could do nothing for himself, mother and son were rescued by an archer called Elcorte, who died immediately after making his bold attempt. There was no one left to thank but his child, and the man's courage was right worthy of reward, so terrible, as they came to know, had been the cruelty of the mob, who impaled Prata, kicked women to pieces, and gave Taurello's entire household to the flames. Sordello, the archer's son, had accordingly been nurtured by Ecelin in the quiet retreat of Goito. And the story, reporting as it did Taurello's loss, made clear why Adelaide came to the castle from time to time: the soldier, having no family for which to gain anything by meriting reward at the hands of the House of Romano, might be got at, when at Mantua, by Este of Azzo, who was anxious to win back Palma, the daughter of Ecelin and his former wife, Agnes Este, by having her married to his ally Boniface.

320-352. The story told in answer to his quest.

Yet, with this accepted as the history of his birth, Sordello, just appointed Palma's minstrel, was still to be —Monarch of the World! For when, on the day on which he heard this tale, the array of glories he had meant to act out was all wrapped up and put away, he decided that, instead of being a slave to longings he was always hoping to express in deeds but was constrained to suppress owing to his poor physical powers—instead of being one who, until he should be magically endowed with bodily strength and grace and practical wisdom, dared not take to himself the commanding superiority claimed by his dreams—he would rest content with his imaginations in themselves, rendered inexpressible in action by his frail body, yet would claim that superiority none the less. He would claim it now in virtue of his mind itself, with its marvellous fancies. These he would do

352-362. He abandons the intention of acting out his imaginations,

362-461. But decides to reveal them through song.

his best to reveal to men by so limited a means as song, and let the idea of action go by. In his own sight he could never be one of the common race, with only this peculiarity—that his fancies, while they were of the same order as those of other men, were specially rich and varied. Never again was a common law allowed for him and the crowd—never was it allowed even when it was fully discussed in his own mind,—discussed calmly, too, however strongly the very idea of such a law might be scouted at the outset by a mad impulse which was justified by nothing short of the belief that he was Apollo.

367-380. He is too great to act, as ordinary men must do to display what is in them.

If he is thus totally different from men, why should he require to shape his course after any of their examples? In nature he is infinitely superior to them, just as he had found that he was of a higher nature than the flowers. Doing nothing, he is greater than those who act, since each man acts under the influence of a single interest or power, which draws him on to his activities. One man is trained to strength, another to beauty, the body of each, with its deeds, being moulded by his dominating idea; but Sordello has already gained all the results attained by all men, because, through imagination, he thoroughly grasps whatever they can pride themselves upon. In his own soul he enjoys the full sense of Boniface's might and of Palma's grace; and he can realise himself as perfect at once in strength and in grace, or, for the time being, as, above all things, strong, or as, above all things, graceful. Yet he remains free, being uncramped by any organ that will give expression to certain qualities only. He is never, for example, fixed down to being an actually strong man, letting all his energies turn to strength, or an actually wise man, with wisdom for his sole business. This means that Sordello has no love for anything—that, all excellence being within him, there is nothing above him that, like a star overhead, commands his being and leads him forth to serve it with all his might.

"And it is most fortunate," said Sordello, "that this

my body never strove to give expression to my soul, so great and varied in its conceptions—that my body never took, through action, the mould the first chance fancy might have given it, and so did not, becoming contracted and cold, clog for ever my soul and make it averse to change as my body would have been. As things are, my body, never taking a particular set from actual business in the world, though it remains in itself a poor, dark thing, leaves my soul free to range through its own imaginations, and encumbers it little, if it cannot be of any help. Therefore range, free soul! who, by being conscious of thine own wondrous fancies, dost express within thyself, and to thyself, the highest degree of beauty, and dost possess the grace of being able to perceive and appreciate all kinds of grace; which is to have their quintessence. As for the world, if it can wonder at and reverence men who have, in turn, something above themselves to wonder at and admire—if it has for its idols those who themselves idolise something else—if it counts men wise and strong when they put themselves under the power of strength and of wisdom,—how low it shall bow before me, when it sees that the highest attributes are by nature mine."

**397-404.** And his imagination has acquired no rigid set from actual life.

**405-414 and 425-439.** Having the best within himself, he cannot worship, but will be worshipped.

(Dear 'Monarch of the World,' as you call yourself, notice how lamentably wide a breach there is in your nature, which is composed of body and soul; then ask, further, what the world has to do with all this. Be, if you choose, a god with a frail human frame; let men be as puny as they may, and look you down from your heights of perfection and laugh. Call yourself god—then choke on a cross olive-stone! How is the world to be interested in knowing what you, who do it neither good nor evil, know about yourself?)

**415-424.** "Even so, Sordello," says Browning, "what does it matter to the world?"

"The world will bow down to me, who can imagine the whole of man's life, and can see from afar all its kinds of bliss, while I taste none of them in actual life. Since my body is weak, there is no machine wherewith to work out the whole of my mind before men; therefore

let me rejoice in my own fancies. Let men perceive what I could do were a fitting instrument mine, and believe in my mastery, which is declared and proved to them by their own selected method of song. By song it will be revealed to them that I am, by nature, whatever they are or seek to be. My words, not my deeds, will speak. To act out what I am would be to change the standard of perfection in the world and to vex men with the sight of a new creation; but, by song, I shall simply show each one what he most admires and cherishes, and will cease at the point at which my song has expressed the highest ideal they can attain; so that each will love in me the quality he loves most, which, being thus set before him, will draw his soul to the full development of its powers."

**440-461. Sordello's song, his one point of contact with the world, will be mighty to move it.**

Sordello—to cut the matter short—determined to express his divine mind through song. It was the only method granted to men of receiving his self-revealment; and through it he would dispense himself to them, and so win from them the sense of his supremacy. Kept from expressing himself in any other manner, he would live content with verse as the sole outlet of his fancies. With his small ungainly body he would not, in order to win admiration, strive to be actually strong, or set himself in graceful attitudes; nor would he use wisdom to mould men's conduct in real life. Song would be his mind's one point of contact with the world, but it was all he would require in order to move it to the very heart. Mankind would be like some huge throbbing stone, which sounds that would set it in motion must hit in but one key. Thunder and the howling of the wind may strike it without effect; but only let that key be sounded by the faintest noise—by the far-off hunter's halloo, by the screech of the curlew, by the hiss of a serpent—and the sound, however loud, however soft, will make the monster shake.

296. 'my own month.' The month of May, on the seventh day of which Browning was born.

297. 'of blossoming.'

> "Hark! where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge
> Leans o'er the field and scatters on the clover
> Blossoms and dew-drops—at the bent spray's edge,
> That's the wise thrush."
>
> —*Home Thoughts from Abroad.*

300. 'Massic jars.' At the foot of Mons Massicus, in Campania, was the Ager Falernus, famed for its wine.

301. 'Baiæ.' On the coast of Campania. It was noted for its baths, and was a favourite holiday resort of the Romans.

303. 'only a lute.' The only difference being that now a lute lay beside him.

316. 'a reason.' A desire to find the reason.

321. 'the tale.' Which, as we shall see, was false.

323. 'Vivaresi.' The banishment of the whole faction is historical (Sismondi's *Hist. des Rép. Ital.*, ch. xii.)

327. 'young Ecelin was born.' Historical (Sismondi, as above).

340. 'his prince.' Elcorte's.

346. 'of Agnes Este.' Palma, historically, was the daughter of Adelaide.

351. 'went the report.' The motive so reported was not Adelaide's real, or at least her chief, one. Bk. I., l. 971 f. The people were right, however, in considering Taurello 'ambiguous.'

356. 'that array.' The glory of a peculiar birth, and the hope, founded upon it, of a glorious display in life's action.

382. 'his star.' Called elsewhere 'his moon' and 'his orb.' The idea is worked out in more detail in Bk. VI., l. 26 f.

## Ll. 462-555.

*When Sordello, at first discontented with the work involved in professional minstrelsy, bestirs himself, his success is, in a sense, too great, inasmuch as, owing to the people's heartfelt applause, he begins to enjoy being a poet, and so is tempted to be satisfied with only a piece of supremacy in real life.*

**462-473. Sordello's song-plan awaits a chance of execution.**

Sordello's purpose of expressing himself, and the world's concerns, are not likely to interfere for a time. The trivial matter of slaughter and burning with which men are busy this year will serve to while away the time till he shall show himself and sing. Meanwhile, enough

thinking being done, he can dream. Any day on which the chance of singing may offer itself will serve. Were his plan less digested, he might be nervous about its execution, but, with it so well laid, how can he go wrong? "Meantime," he says to himself, "passively enjoy this quiet Goito life."

473-476. A chance comes.

One day he received from Naddo a missive praying him to come and sing at Mantua. He read it with delight, and went.

Reaching the city at evening, he found the people full of expectation. Foes were afraid to speak, and the crowd was as a crowd of angels, ready to fall down before

476-492. Sordello's bad start

this god of song. But, in trying how he might satisfy them, Sordello found that this meant labour—that this channel of expression was a sore annoyance. It was men's worship he longed for, and he took not the slightest interest in song for its own sake. So had it been when the girls of his imagination poured their praises forth: singing to them had cost no pains. Now, however, having stepped out from dreams, he cannot gain the end without troubling to use the means—cannot have the actual praise without the actual song. One is loth to say it, but Sordello began at last to use Eglamor's rhymes. There arose a murmuring at this on the part of the other bards; but Naddo bade them

492-513. Is explained by Naddo.

go hang. This master poet, he maintained, knew well what he was about. He was not going to waste his energies: he was seeking first to find out what the people were interested in and would care to hear sung. He was a true bard, in short, say what they might; for, while he had flights of fancy in plenty, he had sense enough not to soar above people's heads, and intended to build his songs on the broad interests and average passions of men, so that they might understand when they heard. "And that," said Naddo, "is not a gift that brings its possessor happiness; for the jealousy of fellow-craftsmen, so called, will not leave him alone. We have plenty of counterfeit bards — warriors and

statesmen, who are counted poets—but it is seldom we get the real poet-soul. After all, this power of seeing what lies in common human life, and of making men behold, by means of song, their own joys and sorrows, is a freak of nature, and is so incompatible with the stupid happiness of us ordinary minstrels that, if I had a son who should improve upon our common breed of performers and become a genuine poet, I should be cursed indeed."

513-545. Sordello's great success in poetry

"Well," said Sordello, "it's best to go boldly on now. If I do fail, there's Goito to fall back upon."

And he does go on with a vengeance! As you might study a picture on some old arras to learn how the angelot used to be played by page or by girl, so you might work with a glossary, and, getting the meaning of certain terms, understand what Sordello could represent by his use of the different kinds of poetic forms then in vogue. It would be a laborious task, but surely you would gain some idea of what so struck the people when he sang? Not quite! It is impossible to realise the effect he produced upon them when, out of their turbulent time, he extracted its different root-qualities and gave them human shape. Greedily they listened while he made virtues and vices, each clad in its proper dress, pass, as it were, before their very eyes.

545-555. Tempts him to accept common human joys.

Why did Sordello stop, surprised at his success?

In one sense, his poetry-scheme, designed for the revelation to men of his grand conceptions, had been too suddenly realised. He began to find no little pleasure in the praise of his singing, and was thus tempted to accept a limited joy of real life. He had about him an eager and delighted crowd, from which he received delicious homage, as when a woman said, "Why does my lover Anafest ask less of me than the Lucio of whom you sing—though, only yesterday, before you showed me what a man's passion can be, I thought he asked enough?" or when a youth said, "You are in love with my Bianca, and of course to you I can be no

rival." Such tributes as these poured in upon him ere he had arranged how to strip them of what was individual and particular, and so secure their essence. The praise of his minstrelsy made him long after the ordinary joys of real life—made him long also to take part in life in other ways—though, since his plan was to taste all joys by showing men that in conception they were already his, he still meant to taste these pleasures only for a time.

474. 'truchman.' Cp. l. 146. Was Browning thinking of the German *Truchsess*, 'a steward'? or is the word the French *truchement*, 'interpreter'?

476. 'The evening star was high When he reached Mantua.' This is upside down. It means: 'He reached Mantua that very evening, but the fame roused by the report of his coming was there before him.'

480. 'angels.' See l. 635 f. Sordello expects they all have genius sufficient to make them appreciate the nature he will reveal.

488. 'his Delians.' The caryatides of the font at Goito.

493. 'the rhymes at last were Eglamor's.' For the art of the troubadours see Sismondi's *Literature of Europe*. The frequent repetition of certain rhyming sounds was a feature of their poetry. Sordello, while singing his own 'matter,' used rhymes Eglamor had made for himself. This, at least, seems to be the meaning; for Sordello would scarcely deliberately repeat Eglamor's very songs.

501. 'gift of gifts.' This doctrine of the 'revelation of the obvious' is one dear to our modern philosophy. Naddo returns to it (l. 783 f.)

504. 'Of warriors, statesmen.' These are some of the counterfeit poets. Many kings and princes—Frederick II. among them—posed as bards, and most of their knights felt bound to follow suit.

516. 'tenzon.' In which love and gallantry were discussed before the Courts of Love.

'sirvent.' A martial or political song.

549. 'fain relinquish.' Under the government of 'He caught himself.'

## Ll. 555-617.

*Sordello tries to intensify his success in song by forging for himself a language by which he may give complete expression to his imagination. The attempt fails, and he returns to his former style.*

555-587. Sordello tries to forge a more expressive language,

The magician, after receiving assurance that he has worked successfully from the rules prescribed by the first page of his book, must turn at once to the next, lest the spell should break. So Sordello urged himself to go forward to greater poetic exploits. "Compel your art," he said to himself, "which has accomplished so much, to do a great deal more: it has not exercised its full power yet. Can men not bear something more than this allegorising of abstract qualities? 'Present us, in your song, with ourselves as complete creatures, and not merely with our loves and hates personified,' men are saying to me now!"

Sordello, however, did pause, but with a purpose. He devoted his attention to his language, which had failed to express a tithe of what was imaged in his mind, and he attempted to recast it. Taking the words of the new speech of his time, he wrought them, so to speak, into a rough kind of armour for the clothing of his ideas—and, crude as it was, the speech he forged for himself developed later into a language finer than the Roman tongue from which it was originally derived. Having taken this trouble, Sordello put the new vehicle of expression to the test. Living for a time in several actors of a certain kind of action, he developed the idea of a creature in whom would be embraced all that each of the several actors could be conscious of and excel in, and this creature he proceeded to exhibit to the people. It was a vain attempt. Perception is too great for such a work of thought as language. Thought may communicate parts of a perception, but can never be co-extensive

587-617. Which will not work.

with it. A perception is independent of the conditions of time, and can therefore be conveyed to others only in bits—by being broken down into descriptions and situations—and much of it must in the end remain unrevealed. Naturally, the crowd, not having the perception of Sordello's 'creature,' tried to form an idea of him by putting together Sordello's thoughts—what came to them in his language—but since, instead of 'destroying' or breaking down his perception into descriptions and illustrations, he tried to make his language express his vision directly to them, they had a painful task imposed upon them. In short, they could not understand him; and it was as difficult, he thus discovered, to find a means of expressing in speech what was stored in his marvellous imagination as to act it out in real life.

**601-617. He returns to the common speech.**

"Besides," he said to himself, "even if I could express it all to them, what an uncalled-for work that would be, since I can enjoy my fancies within myself and behold my inner being as the ideal of every man! Moreover, the people I sing to are not likely to conceive anything higher than the highest I have shown them through the ordinary language. They praised me for what they got. We might go farther and fare worse; so let them be content with the old kind of verse, and me with the old praise."

The new armour had crushed the delicate ideas it was meant to clothe, and Sordello hurled it off in pieces, as Apollo might have hurled afar the quoits by which he had suddenly overwhelmed his beloved Hyacinth.

Using the former language once more, Sordello began to celebrate the exploits of Montfort over the Albigenses.

566. 'present us with ourselves.' So the people say in his brain, not elsewhere. They are charmed with his performances, and think them perfect.

567. 'mere loves and hates.' In apposition with 'portions.'

577. 'in time to be Approved.' Sordello is credited with having done much to develop the Provençal language, which one

would naturally take to be meant here. The lines that follow, however, tell us that what he 'hammered out' proved a failure. Perhaps we are to understand that he wrought his armour out of his 'native vulgar tongue' (the 'new speech' of l. 576?), which Dante (*De Vulgari Eloquentia*, Bk. I.) tells us he utterly forsook. (See *The Latin Works of Dante*, Dent's edition.)

584. 'with the result.' L. 566 seems to support the interpretation in the text. Might the passage mean that Sordello, after living by the force of his imagination in the very heart of different characters, tried to portray the ideal man? This appears to derive some support from ll. 601-605.

589. 'perceptions whole.' Shakespeare may have seen Hamlet and all his tragedy at one flash, but he has presented him to us in many speeches and dramatic situations; and we still probably fail to see much of him that appeared in the poet's mind. Unfortunately — or fortunately — Browning does not give us a specimen of Sordello's special language. No doubt it would have closely resembled some of his own.

600. 'destroy.' Used in its etymological sense, as the opposite of 'construct.'

'a Muse.' Means of expression, for which poets invoke some Muse.

603. 'impertinence.' Used in its etymological sense of 'what is beside the point.' After all, to enjoy his fancies, whether the people saw them completely or not, was the chief thing. But there are sour grapes here.

614. 'so might Apollo.' When Apollo was teaching Hyacinth to play quoits, one of those thrown by the god was violently driven upon the beloved youth by the jealous Zephyrus and killed him. From his blood Apollo caused to spring the flower bearing his name.

617. 'of Montfort.' Simon de Montfort, father of our Simon de Montfort, founder of the English Parliament in the reign of Henry III. Here is a specimen of his crusading exploits, done to the order of Pope Innocent III. In 1211 he besieged the castle of Vauve, and took it after a stout resistance, the defenders surrendering at discretion. Four hundred of them he burned, their souls being condemned to eternal flames; ninety he put to the sword; and he hanged the leader of the defence, whose sister he cast alive into a well and covered over with stones. Contemporary historians, we are told, gloried, like our minstrel, in his exploits, but later writers blush and keep silence. We may yet learn, however, that Montfort was a kind-hearted aristocrat with great difficulties to contend with.

'the Mountaineers.' The Albigenses. Their faith was that of the Paulicians, or, as they were called in Italy, Paterini. Some,

if not all—they were strong supporters of religious toleration—were practically Manichæan. They believed in the good God, the God of spirit, to whom the New Testament belongs, and in the evil God, or God of matter, whose work the Old Testament is, with its record of divine jealousy and revenge. They denied the power of priests, indulgences, purgatory, miracles of the Church, and transubstantiation, and they opposed the worship of the Virgin, and held that infants dying unbaptised might be saved. (See Sismondi's *Hist. des Rép. Ital.*, ch. xii., and Milman's *Latin Christianity*, Bk. IX., ch. viii.)

## Ll. 618-655.

*Successful as it is in pleasing the people, Sordello's poetry fails to serve his purpose, because they accept it as a magnificent description of the attributes, not of himself, but of others.*

**618-633. His hearers refuse to regard Sordello as more than a great human poet.**

The world of men, which Sordello used as merely a means of reflecting himself, now took its revenge. Its pleasure was what he sought, that he might see himself mirrored in it, and what was its pleasure now? The people were pleased "not to be such fools as to learn the lesson you wish to teach us—as to believe that you are in yourself all you sing about to us!" He found that they never thought of mistaking him for the meanest of the heroes celebrated in his song; and infinitely further were they from accepting him as all his heroes rolled into one. What did they care for his perfect mind! They wondered how this weak, puny minstrel could sing so richly and brilliantly about Montfort; but, while they praised him as the singer, they took good care to praise Montfort as the soldier.

**633-655. Wherein they betrayed their gross stupidity!**

This threw the poet into a state of anger. Who were these Mantuans after all, that he should be concerned about them? They were too stupid to see that his songs were a revelation of what was within him. The truth was, as he now perceived, that he had been

regarding these Mantuans as much higher creatures than they were. He had been subjectively bestowing an excellence upon these curs, as he had once endowed the flowers at Goito with mind and feeling. In some common woman he had beheld Palma; another had figured before him as the black-haired Adelaide. His magic wand had been over them. A few great characters had made all the crowd appear like them in his sight: they had thrown over it an imaginary dignity, and given a fictitious value to their applause. In short, he was as far as ever from displaying or revealing his essential being, which was the first and last object of his poetry. Nay, inasmuch as it was making his audiences behold other heroes, poetry kept them from seeing what he was, and therefore proved a hindrance to his purpose. What was the use, then, of making believe that he found in the praise of men the hoped-for reflection of himself?

619. '"Not to play the fool."' "Our pleasure is—not to be such fools as to take you as you wish."

638. 'the convention.' Does this refer to l. 444? Or to l. 479? Or does it mean the 'crowd he contrived' (Bk. I., l. 747 f.), who were understood to be ready to fall down before him?

642. 'the bright band.' Evidently the flowers.

653. 'what he hoped assistance.' What he had hoped would be a help to his self-display—that is, song.

## Ll. 655-867.

*Sordello's professional minstrelsy, with its attendant intercourse with the Mantuans, becomes a rock on which he splits into two parts.*

*He is conscious of himself as an ordinary man, trying to get on in the world by means of his art, and this—the Man-part—is hampered by the Idealist, or Poet, part, who must needs be everything or nothing in actual life, and*

*still hopes to reveal himself through poetry as possessed, in conception, of every attribute.*

*On the other hand, the Poet-part is hampered by the Man-part, who, having an eye to business, regards the expression of the Poet-part's essential nature as a thing that will not pay.*

**655-867. Sordello is conscious of himself as two distinct beings.**

**659-693. As a man among men he is weakened by the idealist.**

After a time Sordello, through the influence of his manner of life at Mantua, split into two parts, each of which warred against the other. The Poet-part, full of ideal conceptions, hopelessly impeded the Man-part, who, no longer bound to the necessity of believing that he was Apollo, thought of himself as being set in this or in that position, with such and such interests, in real life, and never, simply because the Poet-part insisted on either enjoying the glory of making a full revelation of his princely nature or not enjoying human applause at all, refused to avail himself of any opportunity of winning ordinary admiration from men. The Man-part could not be withheld from attempts of some kind by the bright dreams that the Poet-part was sure would one day be fully realised to the people by means of song. The Man-part was conscious of himself as an ordinary mortal, willing to appear among men as one of themselves, and not arrayed in angelic beauties; and he might some day appear a still sorrier specimen in his own eyes for anything he actually accomplished, because, when he sang, he was hampered by the Poet-part, who was determined not to sing anything of the common type, and not to sing at all unless his song would express all the perfection of his regal nature. Language, it may be said in this connection, though at first it had been only a makeshift, whereby, instead of through action, he would show men what he essentially was, was now, according to the Poet-part, to be the great thing: Apollo, it had been decided, would not act at all, but would sing in such a way as to make men see that he was the prince of each

nature—perfect in his conception of the qualities in which each nature excelled, or wished to excel. Yet the Poet-part, when not dreaming of this perfect vehicle of revelation, condescended to partial and conventional modes of expression, because the Man-part stepped in to say that it was foolish to sing if the song failed to hit the popular taste, as the full poetic verse, revealing Apollo, assuredly would: 'it would not pay,' said the Man-part.

These, then, were the two portions into which Sordello split. Sordello as one—the being of perfect attributes, who condescended not to express himself as of less than perfect nature—one in the idea of his nature's perfection and of exhibiting that nature to the world—was gone.

694-717. The immediate demands of the Mantuans keep him from consistently following either nature.

Sordello might have settled once for all which 'part' he was to follow, and so have been delivered from the wearing struggles between the two, had it not been for the real, live Mantuans, who always called him to action while he was pondering which would be the easier plan — to persevere with poetry in the hope that men would at length see that it revealed his own nature, or to give up the attempt altogether and mix, like other minstrels, in the common life of men, with its enjoyments. Before he could decide, in rushed the Mantuans, to whom, if indeed they knew anything about it, his perplexity was of no moment. His divided nature keeping him from heartily adopting either plan, he was glad to fall back upon the conventional rules which his time prescribed for minstrelsy. It was not worth the trouble to improve upon them—to change them in any way. That would be a superficial feat, like a fool's change in dress or in length of hair.

717-762. His conversation becomes an echo of other men's.

Then, what a sad business his conversation was! When the Mantuans asked him about things that interested them, he scarcely understood what they were talking about, and answered them straightway at random. If he asked himself the essential truth about some matter, he replied quickly in his own mind; but his

reply was of a far-reaching nature and not easily put into words. He would have had to pare it down before it could take rank with the rare specimens of intellectual effort given forth by the Mantuans, who could always make their deliverances fit the occasion, and had a stock-in-trade of opinions to suit all kinds of tastes — opinions mature, pungent, sweet, sour, and sour-sweet, like figs in all stages of ripeness. Now, Sordello might have attained the practice of giving at once answers full of his own meaning and suited to the occasion had he only been able to be either the Poet-part or the Man-part; but, while he was wondering what words would convey to others, who were toying with conventional ideas, and not with vital inward ones like his, and who were concerned about 'scoring' in Mantuan circles—a thing he despised at heart—the occasion demanding an answer slipped clean away. Had his nature not been so divided, he would have made a powerful effort to express his profound ideas; but, as it was, their excellency and the excellency of his speech never came together, and therefore went for nothing. The end was that, on the spur of the moment, he retailed any old quip or maxim, and even copied gestures. If he could not express at once and fully his far-reaching idea, why should he trouble to express a fraction of it? As for men—whoever could might take an interest in them and love the good and hate the bad among them: they were of no use for reflecting the glory of his nature. With conventionality as his refuge, he extolled this one and denounced that one, as public opinion required.

**763-867. As poet, Sordello, not able to show men his ideal nature, does poor work.**

Let us now take up more particularly the Poet-part. Verse, instead of becoming the means of expressing his whole imagination, came almost to a stand-still. He had little impulse to cultivate it, the aim of his daily work being merely not to be beaten by his rivals, who, without any division in their nature, went at it heartily enough, showing great varieties of work, from Bocafoli's

exceedingly plain songs to Plara's sonnets, spoiled with too much ornamentation, and resembling "an almug-tree that has been punctured to the pith for gum, and is on that account all twisted, and wrinkled worse than the pursed-up eyelids of the hippopotamus sunning himself in the mud when the gad-fly whirrs about him." Sordello could easily compete with bards like these, but he had aimed at something infinitely higher than that. "Observe," he said by way of illustrating his poetic nature, "a pumpkin floating on a pond. I might pluck one of its cups if my hand were not so strong that it would pull up the whole plant, root and all; and so I might pluck for you, as it were, one simple bit of song, dealing with a single sight, were my imagination not so powerful that I cannot deal with the simplest external matter without penetrating to the essence of its being and its relation to the universe. How could external things, such as common bards celebrate, satisfy my soul?" "Why, that," Naddo ventured to tell his master, "is precisely the error Squarcialupe finds in you; 'the man,' he says, 'cannot sing us a simple romance, but must deal with his subject like a philosopher.' Now, there is no doubt that you are a great poet, but you're not a philosopher, and these problems are wholly out of place in poetry, which must appeal to men on the ground of their common nature, with its broad interests. Your first poetry, now, was of the right kind. There was no affectation about it; you sang about what we all know exists. 'The man,' we said when we heard you, 'tells his own joys and woes.' If you would have your songs last, you must build on the human heart—not your own, which is decidedly peculiar, but the common healthy heart of humanity at large. A man cannot act unless he be at peace within himself—undistracted by questions as to the ultimate ground of existence. It may be true that fire rankles at the heart of every globe, but in the world's life we cannot concern ourselves with such hidden things. Such inquiries do not belong to poetry.

**783-811.** Naddo lectures on the function of poetry.

Instead of going to the very roots of things, you should adopt a theory of poetry (you may laugh at the idea if you like, but that does not affect the force of what I am saying) according to which the poet, not entering into the ultimate source of things, should only see common sights and events more clearly than other men do. What? you say I am disparaging the poet's function? That's most unfair. Don't I hold that the genuine poet is one selected from a vast number of men who both act and claim to be poets at the same time—— Oh! I told you that before, did I? Very likely. Well, you should hide that sense of power you have — the power to penetrate to final causes—to know how all things are done—to extract from a single sight a whole philosophy of existence. The true bard is, first and last, a seer: he beholds clearly what actually lies in human life, and has the power to express it to his fellows. But he believes any man can accomplish, in the way of action, what he can, because he knows his province is not action at all: in action he remains the greatest simpleton of all. Yes! The reputation you enjoy as a poet must be your sole reward."

**811-820.** And on the poet's dignity and reward.

Naddo, as one may see from all this, was the busiest of 'genius-haunters.' By what other phrase shall I describe those who, whether from love or from hate, take an ineffably active interest in a great man? They find their soul's nourishment in employing their faculties in wearing and tearing him — in discussing keenly every bit of his nature and his habits. Fifty of these creeping things about Sordello at once! How could he keep them off? They got well lodged on him, and the poor bard was put to shame, since he did whatever any haunter bade him do—the veriest fool among them, as Naddo put it, turning him round his thumb. To anything they said Sordello at once agreed, wishing only to get rid of them and to retire to Goito, where he could meditate on what difference there really was between his nature and that of other men.

**821-839.** 'Genius-haunters' and their effect on Sordello.

839-867. Even the internal power of Sordello's imagination is impaired.

Yet even in the attempt to think their thoughts and speak their speech, Sordello was but partially successful. He would miss some chance of pleasing them, because, ere he could realise in what little corner of his existence they could meet him—what, in short, he could sing that they would understand—he found himself called upon to perform, and was helpless. For, when he tried to give them some individual limited fancy from his store, his imagination itself swayed to and fro, unable not only to arrange this fancy in language but to keep it distinct even within himself. A selected vision soon became blurred with other visions. He had lost the art of orderly dreaming or imagining. For example, the sight of a court-gallant at Mantua suggested that he should picture a man of the senses—all body—but scarcely had he condescended so low in his imagination as to fashion such a creature when he felt he must put something of the spiritual into him; and gradually this sensual being developed into Apollo. So the fancy was taken back, and remained unspoken. Then, when some Paulician, like those men Ecelin II. associated with, scanned the gay dress of the court-minstrel, the old man's religious face suggested to Sordello a being in whom soul is everything; but no sooner had he pictured such an one in his imagination than he felt the necessity of putting some human passions into him; and again he came to grief within ere he could utter a word.

683. 'perverse.' Ironical. He had been pleased to choose, not to act.

691. 'John's cloud-girt angel.' Rev., ch. x.

714. 'Let Vidal change.' This may refer to a troubadour mentioned by Sismondi. "Pierre Vidal . . . was no less celebrated for his extravagant actions than for his poetical talents. Persuaded that he was beloved by every lady, and that he was the bravest of all knights, he was the Quixote of poetry." (*Lit. of Europe*, ch. v.)

715. 'murrey.' Mulberry.

'filamot.' Colour of a dead leaf.

731. 'rathe-ripe.'

> "Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies."—*Lycidas.*
>
> "Too rathe cut off by practise criminall."
> —*Faerie Queene*, Canto III.
>
> "The men of rathe and riper years."—*In Memoriam*, CX.

We use the comparative 'rather.'

744. 'had just a lifetime.' It would have taken Sordello a lifetime to 'trim and clip' his answer to the pattern of Naddo's answers, which pleased the conventional ideas of the Mantuans.

768. 'Turned.' This is probably a misprint for 'tuned'—kept singing away—which stands in the original edition. But Browning may have changed it, and have meant 'skipped lightly' from one kind of song to another.

783. 'Squarcialupe.' Cp. l. 118 and Bk. v., l. 1014.

792. 'based upon common sense.' Cp. l. 494 f.

801. 'Central peace.' One can only guess here.

813. 'did I tell you?' L. 502 f.

828. 'undertake.' Take under their management.

'o'er-toise.' Take the measure of. (Through French from Lat. *tendere*, 'to stretch.')

831. 'the monarch of mankind.' L. 355; l. 415.

859. 'Count Lori.' The reckless baron.

860. 'peasant-Paul.' Paulician. See note on l. 617.

861. 'old Ecelin confers with.' Ecelin II. was suspected of the heresy. His hopeful sons, in fact, offered to deliver him up to the Inquisition (which was founded by Innocent III.), but this was too much even for the Pope.

## Ll. 868-905.

*By the time Sordello reaches this point in his career, Adelaide's death has threatened the House of Romano with collapse.*

**868-905. Adelaide has died, and Monk Ecelin has abandoned Taurello and the Ghibellin cause.**

It is time to explain that meanwhile Adelaide had died suddenly, with none to mourn her end. Her strong hand withdrawn, the sons and daughters of Romano House came rustling down to the valley from their castles on the hills. And soon Taurello received from Monk Ecelin a missive beginning thus: "I am sick, and

old, and, I believe, half crazed; what good can the Emperor's gold do me now? Even my children are eagerly watching my strength decline, delighted to see how day by day my breastplate becomes heavier for me to bear. Besides, I am always in prayer now, and am sworn to kneel till God will exact punishment for the cruelties I have wrought, which you know well, and for other things of which you are ignorant. And that reminds me that Azzo's sister Beatrix is betrothed to my son Alberic, and Richard's Giglia to my son Ecelin. Count Richard himself must have Palma. So will Ghibellin and Guelf settle this weary strife and dwell together in peace." This came like a thunder-clap upon Taurello, who had sworn to go off the following month on a crusade with the Emperor. "That accursed Vicenza!" he cried. "That Adelaide should choose to die when I must leave Italy!" Riding many a horse dead on the road, he stood before Monk Ecelin with his bloody spurs still fixed, but he came too late to make him change his mind. "Let me alone," said the monk. "Did I ever wish to enlarge my power? You and the Emperor may plot as you will against the Pope; only do let me be. But I will yield one point: you may keep Palma at Goito, and use her in your political game. Only agree to leave me!"

879. 'Monk Hilary.' Evidently Ecelin's monastic name.

882. 'and some you never knew.' This no doubt refers to the concealment of Sordello. (See Bk. v., l. 811.)

893. 'That accursed Vicenza.' This may mean 'his cursed monkhood,' the convent of Oliero being at Vicenza; but more probably it refers to the riot at Vicenza, which led Ecelin to become a monk.

896. 'he stood before Romano.' But compare Bk. IV., l. 663.

902. 'first.' When Adelaide married him? Taurello was really her right-hand man (Bk. IV., l. 602).

## Ll. 905-1016.

*Ecelin II.'s abandonment of the cause bringing Taurello to Mantua, Sordello is appointed to welcome him with a song. The poet is distracted, retires from the city to think about his verses, wanders to Goito, and stays there.*

**905-934. Sordello is appointed to sing Taurello's welcome at Mantua.**

It was now in every one's mouth how this great servant of Ecelin, who had got his dismissal after having worked so long for his master, might now doff the Romano badge and take a rest at Mantua. Since the death of Retrude, whom, as a young bride from Sicily, he had brought to live there till the people of Ferrara should build a palace worthy of one of Imperial blood—which she did not live to see—Taurello, though his family was an old one in Mantua, and its people remained proud of him even when he devoted to Romano the strength they thought he ought to have expended on his own fortunes, never—so report ran—visited it while he was wholly satisfied with Ecelin.

When it was known that Taurello was coming, it was arranged that Sordello, as court-minstrel, should celebrate his advent. "Take a friend's advice," said Naddo, "and be careful; for your rivals (such impudence some folk have!) are displeased that you have been chosen to sing the welcome of the great man. This will prove a test, remember. Your rivals are watching you, and they say freely enough that you can't take such poetic flights as you once could. Be sure to put them in the wrong—sing well." What a wonder Sordello was not helped forward with his song!

**934-959. And retreats to Goito.**

On the eve of Taurello's arrival the minstrel went away from Mantua slowly and alone. His brain was like a stone, but from it song must be struck. What trouble sat upon his brow? It was born of the fact

that, the night before, when Naddo, who had met the great soldier on his progress, praised his bearing, which was always the same whatever misfortunes might befall him, it occurred to Sordello that Taurello would be pleased with a song in which such an external joy as this dignified mien should be proved a hollow thing—that this warrior, who had lost wife and child, and whose life-work was now threatened by Ecelin's last move, might have a secret satisfaction if the minstrel cunningly represented that 'things are not what they seem.' But this would be an awkward subject for a gala-welcome, and would mightily displease the people. So Sordello wandered forth, saying to himself that, if a more suitable theme presented itself, good and well, but he cared not if he did not sing at all. On he went till evening, when he paused weary on a hill-top. Then he passed down the gorge with a sweet sense of nature's soothing power. In the light of the moon the features of the landscape gradually came out, like those of a well-known face: he was looking upon the mountain-cup of Goito, with its castle. He had come upon it through a defile which, being the one the Chief was wont to vanish by after his visits to Adelaide, he had never dared to explore.

959-993. *Dulce domum.*

The old full dream of Apollo wrapped him round once more. He ceased to be the crossed and fretful minstrel of the Mantuan court. For years past—during that minstrel life—he had been like some spice-tree seedling that has grown up on a pavement between bits of mosaic work. A weakly thing, it is suffered to remain there because it pleases the Sultan's pining daughter; but the day she dies it is plucked up and thrown into the court, and there, taking root again, it finds room for growth beside the parent tree. At sight of Goito, Sordello expanded to his former self and became Apollo once again. Here were home and rest after the bitter experiences that had attended his purpose of revealing himself to men through song.

The castle had of late years been going to ruin; and the change made it more mysterious than ever. It was night when Sordello reached it, but the darkness could not restrain him from exploring, torch in hand, the maple chamber. Its floor of cedar beams had now such gaps that streams of cold air blew through them from the dungeon below, and, listening carefully, one might have heard the drip, drip of the water there. The recesses of the chamber retained their long chests, now empty, but still smelling of orris-root, which Adelaide, when busied with her garments, had been wont to grate over them to recruit her jaded faculties. Palma was away that day, as he was told by the few old servant-women that were left. Lastly, he lay down beside the marble caryatides in the vault.

**994-1003.** Sordello's two great plans have failed, but the pride of imagination remains.

There Sordello reflected how his body, through which he once intended to act out all his grand imaginations before men—through which he was to be exhibited as perfect soldier, statesman, prince, and everything else in one—had been proved unfit even to begin its task; and how song, as a plan for revealing to men that perfect conceptions of even more than the best of them could be were stored within his mind, had been a failure also. Was there something wrong, then, in the very idea of his being Apollo? On this question he meditated, pressing his brow on the moonlit shelf beside the youngest marble maid; then, raising it, he smiled to think he was still Monarch of Men because of what was within him. "I shall be king again in the realms of my imagination," he thought, while he drew off Palma's scarf, which any other minstrel would fain have worn, and threw his crown into the font.

**1003-1016.** An item of the programme is dropped at the Mantuan games.

Next day there was no poet at the Mantuan show. When Taurello asked for the promised song, the master of ceremonies looked perplexed; but Naddo, coming to the rescue, said his highness knew what a touchy race poets were, and how they were understood to have a right to indulge in caprice, or, if spite would better

describe the thing, how one must take them with their mixture of strength and weakness; and so chattered on till he ran out of stock-phrases, when the easy-natured soldier let that item of the programme drop, and nodded that they might go on with their bull-bait.

910. 'Retrude's death.' Retrude appears to have no place in history.

913. 'Till the Ferrarese.' The palace and gardens are described in Bk. IV., ll. 107-181.

932. 'cobswan.' Male swan, chief of the flock.

958. 'the Chief.' Taurello Salinguerra.

966. 'cat's head and ibis' tail.' Figures wrought in the mosaic pavement.

989. 'iris root.' Or orris root, believed to possess great restorative power.

998. 'shelf.' On which the caryatides stood?

# BOOK THE THIRD.

## Ll. 1-57.

*The renewed kingship over nature, however, lasts but a short time. Sordello, resting and thinking at Goito, concludes, not only that the revelation to men of his perfect imagination is impossible, but that he has no such perfect imagination to reveal. He orders the Apollo-idea from the throne of his being.*

**1-25. Sordello's memories of the outer world gradually die away.**

SORDELLO casts away his laurels, tokens of the outer world: the quiet of Goito is all he needs. The idea of revealing himself to men is gone, and the old life of receptivity and dream, which his years of minstrelsy suspended, begins again. Nature, wrapping him round, shall soon make him forget the past, with all the artificial loves and hates its conventionality had taught him. It shall turn him pure as a painted garment woven of byssus (the fine silky threads that tuft the pearly lip of the Tyrrhene whelk) which, on a day long since forgotten, fell from a trireme into the sea, to the vexation of the satrap who owned it. So it befell. The pain and the pleasure of his Mantuan life are gradually washed out of Sordello. All its men and women, its speeches and its deeds, die out of his memory, till at last his fancy sees no remembered face and hears no remembered voice come through the circling eglantines and vines.

This, then, was the end of the machine Sordello had

devised to enable him to perceive himself, or to reflect himself to himself. This self-perception he had sought by forcing himself—a god's pulse beating fiercely in a frail body of clay—on men in order that, standing, as it were, in their admiration and praise of what he revealed in song, he might see himself with their eyes, and thus clearly realise the essential glory of his being. But this revelation had been proved a partial thing, because men took him for nothing more than a skilful minstrel; and now the god's pulsing blood ebbed away from all human limits, never to rise into them again. All that he had hoped to be—a perfect nature perfectly revealed—was at an end.

25-34. Men had failed to enable him to realise his perfect nature.

Of what use, then, was this marvellous imagination, the chief element in the scheme of revelation that had failed? Had he, indeed, not even made a mistake in believing that such a perfect imagination, or Apollo-nature, was his at all? It would seem he had. The idea had been prized inordinately: that his nature was far from perfect had been proved by the fact that, whereas he had sought the quintessence of all human delights, life's individual delights, such as his success in minstrelsy, had been sufficient even to pamper it, and, if these were sufficient, their quintessence must lie beyond its reach. He had been trying to be all men, and yet remain himself; as though that chestnut should long to possess the crisp pink blooms of the larch, or the resinous drops shed by the pines in spring. "Away, therefore," said Sordello to himself, "with this idea of Apollo and his revelation. I thought to become all things before men—perfect prince, knight, warrior, statesman—or at least to show them that I should have been all these in one had not my mere bodily conditions prevented; but I will now content myself with some imagination that will not tempt me to act it out. I was made with a nature sensitive to beauty. So now it is no Apollo, but a mere man, that thou dost comfort and befriend, O moon! Play thou in my

34-57. Was the idea of his having such a nature not a mistake?

imagination. It is enough that thou dwell in my heart, and that, even by its fall and rise, I know when thou dost bury thyself in clouds, and when thou comest forth from them again. My vision and love of thee are direct, and need not be attested to me by men.

2. 'moonfern,' 'trifoly.' Different species of the Trifolium belong to the 'sleeping' order, their leaves being folded at night. It has been supposed that 'mystic' is applied to the trifolium because it was used—at least by St Patrick—to inculcate the doctrine of the Trinity. How does the moonfern, or moonwort, especially denote rest?

34. 'is finished.' The whole idea of a perfect nature perfectly revealed had been disposed of.

43. 'where zephyrs stanch.' When a crack has been made in a pine-branch the sap oozes through it, hardens, and forms a protection for the wound.

49. 'as I first was fashioned.' When he simply enjoyed external nature, and had not 'heightened himself up' into Apollo.

## Ll. 57-204.

*But this content to be done with the world of men proves hollow; and Sordello perceives that, in not surrendering himself to the joys of actual life as they came to him one by one, he has made a grand mistake. Something not himself—a modest country girl, or the licentious luxury of Frederick's court, or years of strenuous fight —might have claimed him; and each thing not himself, as he loved and served it, would have been a step toward perfect happiness. His minstrel's post at Mantua afforded many opportunities of so living, but he spurned them all in his desire to reveal himself for men's worship, and now he feels that his chances of bliss are gone, and gone for ever.*

**57-68. This passive state is not the rest it promised to be.**

Of the year, sweet enough in a sense, that Sordello spent in retirement at Goito, let us say nothing except that, at its close, his eyes, once bright with searching out ways in which he might reveal himself, had become dull

through the mere passive enjoyment of nature. He was not really at rest, for he was conscious of a want. This sleep in life was by no means perfect peace. He was like a man who, standing beside a thundering cataract to have the throbbing of his brain rendered inaudible, still hears its measured click above the water's roar.

69-102. To Nature chances come again: Sordello's, gone, are gone for ever.

One autumn evening there befell an event that made him fully conscious of his dissatisfaction. Few birds were seen in the heaven, which was still and cold and grey. His own mood was like nature's. Life was very low: the songs he had sung at Mantua, and the very art of song, had gone from him like any of the other gifts of the Apollo-mind. He and the year were in 'the sere and yellow leaf,' and, while others might be fools enough to take an interest in the world, knew how hollow early promise was. Suddenly, breaking in upon these gracious meditations, a warning tremor ran through the sky, and quick came a harsh convulsion of the land. The marsh had disappeared; and next morning its old place was covered with a broad expanse of the river Mincio, which, laughing through its mists in the face of the rising sun, burnt like a mass of light spilt from the crashing of a myriad stars.

"Now, here," said Sordello, "is nature, regarded as bound so fast by law, getting a new chance. Alas! it cannot be so with me. Things not done as occasion offers can never be done at all. If the year has autumn, she has her recurring spring: to me 'comes no second spring again.' May I not have two lives, the one to be spent in learning how I may properly live the other? Nature may even go beyond her common order—can soon mend landslip or breach of sea-coast: I, failing once, must fail for ever.

"Ah! what now can I tell myself I may have missed of real life?

103-117. He might have wooed a modest country maid.

"Picture what you might have had, Sordello! You stroll down the field-paths at eventide—down by the thorn-rows, alive with fire-flies, swimming spots of dewy

fire, which also outline the top of the black cypress beneath which your beloved waits. When the snow was here you wooed her, but 'twas April ere she promised to be yours. All the time the lime-trees were in bloom she shyly listened to your voice. It is July now, and you meet, not at the woodside, which is white with summer dust, but here, or at the village elm when the moon is shining through it. You lift her coarse flax veil, take her small damp hand in yours, and talk of love, love, love—of love that lasts till death.

**117-130.** Or he might have revelled in licentious scenes.

"Or riotous luxury might have been yours. You might have mixed with ribalds wandering about the Emperor's perfume-laden island-house at Nuocera, where he holds high revel and, before the eyes of gay Palermitans, and soft Messinese, and dusky Saracenic clans, parades those tall, grave, high-cheeked, lank-haired, white-toothed Norsewomen, queens of the caves of black ice, whom he sent his barks to fetch through the darksome Northern seas. Here, too, are alcoves of softest luxury, brilliant as gilded domes at Byzant.

**131-139.** Or he might have won a soldier's glory and reward.

"Byzant! The name reminds you of something else you may have missed. You have no chance now of growing a veteran like cheery Dandolo, who, circled as by a wall with worshipping hearts, was taken, when his hundred years were told, through the conquered city, while friends noted for him what treasures it were best to take to Venice Square, and flattered him with the promise that he should live to touch them there.

**140-204.** He sees he should have used life, not to reveal what was within him, but as affording objects of service and devotion.

"Ah, you interests of actual life, fragments meant to gather up at last into a great whole—elements in the life of bliss I waited for—what are you but steps by which I should have mounted to happiness? And I mistook you for final happiness itself—for the happiness in which, as is proved even by the blind mistaking instinct that bade me decline individual joys and aim at their quintessence, I have ever had faith. Yes, happiness did await me, but I sought it in the wrong way—by living to my inner self, and not to something not

myself. The way life should be used was what I had to learn, and deeds done for their own sake, and not because they might show my superiority, would have taught me that by drawing out my powers and showing me what new thing I was fit to love and follow. But I have so long deemed self-revealment the very end of life! Whatever seemed a help to this self-revealment was a pleasure; whatever hindered it was none. By failing to use the opportunities of real life I have refused to climb toward happiness, and now it stretches far above my reach. The joys of life, which, because they threatened to circumscribe my ideals of perfection, I dared not entertain, cannot be grasped now; but never till now did I get a glimpse of what a promise of happiness they contained. Common mortals have a life that does not pall; for their soul, however feeble it may be, is distinct from the things that interest them: these are not, to begin with, parts of themselves, and they reach happiness by receiving impressions from them as they are used and so gaining some fresh inward feeling. Such action and reaction between the soul and things that appeal to it from without is the very use of life. The interests and objects that ordinary men love and serve enter into their souls because that love and service become part of their consciousness. Even a man's body may be developed by that to which it is devoted, which reminds me that, in my case also, the physical part does demand something outside itself, even Palma. But I have reckoned there is nothing outside my soul: I cannot, forsooth, truly live till I have realised in the flesh, or translated into action—which my frail form renders ridiculously impossible—all the brilliant conceptions of my soul. There is nothing for me to blend with,—nothing to draw forth my soul in service and bless me. Since my soul owns everything already in conception, I can find nothing alien to it in the world; still less can I assimilate, or render native, what I already own. And since the things of real life, which I meant to

**159-168.** Which react upon and develop the soul.

**168-180.** They have been absent from his life.

make the means of expressing these conceptions and so realising them to myself, proved so inefficient, I would have no more to do with them and trod them underfoot; and now, when I think what a bliss they might have brought had they been rightly used, how grievously they tantalise!

**181-204.** Will some one endowed with a nature like his learn the truth that he has missed?

"Will another being with a nature like mine agree to fling life aside as I have flung it? Or will such an one, in some age to come, be saved from my mistake and try to find something fit to claim his devotion and service? Will he lay hold of some interest such as, though ready to my hand, I have failed to grasp? Why, if I had a chance of moving on a course of true life, did I leave my post at Mantua? Why did I complain that my perfect mind was so much fettered in its revelation, and yet remain content with doing so little? All the time I was bent on self-revealment I felt I could learn much concerning the world were I only inclined to take some little pains, and was proudly idle because I felt that, at any time I might condescend to choose, I could come to understand human life and even penetrate to the heart of its mystery; yet, fool that I was! I forbore, preferring to elaborate conventionalities when one stroke of mine, given from my heart in song, would have brought forth a very flame of truth. The business of minstrel to which I was bound at Mantua was to sing of mankind as I beheld it, and please the hearers with my descriptions; the profit to my own nature would have lain in my securing some truth for my own intellectual enjoyment by rescuing it from the mist in which it had been shrouded by chance, custom, and stupidity."

69. 'To finish.' The story of his retirement at Goito.

81. 'thus stone Outlingers flesh.' Does this express the general idea that the coarser parts of the year and of human life—bare matter and dull experiences—survive the finer elements,—verdure of earth and buoyancy of spirit?

84. 'benevolent employ.' Ironical. Of wishing you joy of the world.

85. 'the welkin.' Lit. 'the place of the clouds' (Ger. *Wolke*).

90. 'spilth.'

"When our vaults have wept
With drunken spilth of wine."
—*Timon of Athens*, Act II. sc. ii.

Compare the formation of our old word 'tilth,' meaning 'earth.'

94. 'Deeds.' Opportunities for deeds. Cp. Bk. VI., l. 1—

"The thought of Eglamor's least like a thought."

98. 'learning save that.' Learning in this life what errors to avoid, so that he may really use the next.

107. 'Elys.' See note on Bk. II., l. 68.

113. 'that holds the moon.' Wordsworth ("If thou indeed derive") speaks of stars

"which seem
Humbly to hang, like twinkling winter lamps,
Among the branches of the leafless trees."

117. 'Tush!' Seems to mean that such pure and humble love is nothing compared with the kind about to be pictured.

123. 'Nuocera holds.' Nocera Inferiore, over twenty miles south of Naples. Frederick II. planted a colony of Saracens there, and this fact may have given the place its older name, Nocera dei Pagani. (*Encyc. Brit.*)

124. 'the morse.' The walrus.

128. 'birdskin robes.' "There came forth the same fair apparitions which they had encountered upon the island, but decked now in feather-robes, and plumes of every imaginable hue." (Kingsley's *Westward Ho!*)

129. 'mollitious.' Lat. *mollis*, 'soft.'

130. 'that devils built!' What is the reference?

132. 'Dandolo.' The Venetians, under Enrico Dandolo, promised to provide the French with ships and provisions for the fourth Crusade on condition of receiving payment of 85,000 marks. When all was ready, it was found that more than a third of that sum could not be paid up, and in lieu of it the Doge cunningly secured the services of the crusaders against the Byzantine Empire. Their help, rendered with no good grace, enabled him, followed as he was by Innocent III.'s excommunication, to take Constantinople, which was given over to plunder, the temples being despoiled of their cups, crucifixes, and reliquaries (1204). Dandolo was blind, but his 'hundred years' are not mentioned by contemporary writers. (Sismondi's *Hist. des Rép. Ital.*, ch. xiv.; Milman's *Latin Christianity*, Bk. IX., ch. vii.; Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, ch. lx.; Mrs Oliphant's *Makers of Venice.*) It is difficult to say what kind of happiness Dandolo represents.

136. 'sardius.' Or 'sard' (from Sardis). A variety of quartz, with a deep-red colour.

141. 'fragments of a whole.' The fragments and points, or essential elements, are the interests of real life (l. 140), in which Sordello has never allowed himself to move and have his being. These are at once the rungs of the ladder by which men must mount to the platform happiness, and the material out of which, through their influence upon the soul, happiness is wrought. 'Deeds' are means to an end, yet they combine to form the end. Cp. Bk. II., l. 395; Bk. VI., l. 26 f.

200. 'My own concern.' That this is the meaning of the passage, which is by itself ambiguous, appears from Bk. IV., l. 263 f.

## Ll. 204-221.

*Sordello now cries out for the least bit of the actual world's life.*

**204-221. But he will yet have a share, however small, in the real world's life.**

"Here I am, hidden in this wood, with tender branches meeting about my neck and laying their moist touch upon mine eyelids; while outside this leafy screen moves the great pageant of to-day's human history, never to be repeated. Here I am, as good as buried, petted with the idea that dreaming among nature's works is better than trying my power upon men, and the pageant is fleeting past. But I will have a place in it! Now it is noon: ere night let me have some effect upon it. Let me, in whatever way, satisfy this yearning to mix in the world's affairs, however little it may be possible for me to do. From what I may yet accomplish men will form a faint idea of what I might have been had I used my life aright, as a blasted bud feebly represents what the full flower might have been; but, if I remain thus idle here, none will know anything of my powers at all—I shall be like the bulb lying hidden and dormant in the grasp of the mummy Taurello sent——"

221. 'Taurello sent.' We may understand 'to Goito.'

## LI. 221-260.

*As if in answer to his desire, he is summoned to Verona to celebrate the expected nuptials of Palma and Count Richard Boniface.*

"Taurello?" Naddo suddenly said, leaning over Sordello's shoulder. "It was Palma who sent me to fetch you; and, believe me, you cannot be sorrier to hear her message than I am to deliver it: I am to take you back with me. I am sorry, I say, to come for you; for what are the gaudy shows of Verona to the heart of a poet? —a few blades of grass are enough to meditate upon. What's the news? Well, where the marsh was, mists are rising like spouts of hell broken loose. Oh! tidings of the world, you mean? I suspect you won't be pleased to hear them. The father of our Patroness divides his wealth between Ecelin and Alberic and goes into a convent; both sons are to wed Guelfs; Count Richard and Palma were betrothed a week ago at Verona, and no doubt what you are wanted for is to compose their wedding-chant before he storms Ferrara, after which event the nuptials will take place."

221-228. Naddo summons him to Verona,

228-248. Gives astounding news of Guelf and Ghibellin,

Then Naddo, telling the story from its beginning, related how, when Taurello Salinguerra had left Ferrara, the Guelfs, emboldened by his absence, burned and pillaged the Ghibellin properties there; how Taurello suddenly returned and took vengeance on them; how Azzo of Este and Count Richard Boniface were doing their best to punish Taurello by storming Ferrara; and how Richard, after finishing the siege, would, by his marriage with Palma, which meant the absorption of the House of Romano, inaugurate a new and better rule.

"Now," added Naddo, "I will not presume to instruct you, my master, how to clothe these doings in poetic garb at Verona. What is your answer to Palma's call? You are coming at once? Surely you jest? To tell

248-260. And lectures him on poetry again.

the truth, I hardly hoped you would agree so readily. Have you learned in this retired spot that there are thoughts too deep and fine for poetic treatment? It is in not remembering this that you poets err. You should describe things as they really are, and compare like with like; but Palma's neck, for example, you call pearl-white, which it is not, and the comparison makes an awkward impression — just as a pearl itself, with a speck of genuine white upon it, has its own white turned to grey."

222. 'Your Trouvère.' See note on Bk. I., l. 989.

232. 'our Patroness.' Palma.

239. 'Then was told.' Cp. Bk. I., ll. 149-187. Naddo (l. 239) knows nothing of the entrapment of Count Richard. This is strange, for it seems as though that very day Verona was loud with preparations for the journey of the League. Cp. Bk. I., ll. 106-113, and elsewhere. It is possible, however, that, though Sordello went off at once with Naddo, he may have been in the city with Palma some time before the 'Verona night.' Does 'one more day' (l. 260) mean 'one day later'?

260. 'Curse the cicala!' The cicala (Lat. *cicada*, the Greek τέττιξ), the tree-cricket. Naddo is annoyed by its note. Compare—

> "The stunning cicala is shrill."
> —*Up at a Villa—Down in the City.*

## Ll. 260-303.

*Having gone back to carry Sordello through his boyhood and youth, Browning sets us down again where he began his hero's story.*

*Verona appears once more in its excited state. Palma and Sordello sit as lovers in the secret chamber of the palace, and then behold from its window the city's preparations for the recapture of Ferrara.*

**260-273. Excited Verona appears once more.**

Now I make Verona appear once more. The streets, as you remember, were full of groups, excited by hearing how Taurello had swooped down on Azzo and Boniface.

The world, men were convinced, was bound to be either positively benefited or positively injured by the issue of the effort they were making to relieve Ferrara; for the success of the Ghibellins in establishing themselves in it was just the kind of thing needed to bring Frederick to Lombardy, there to renew the old strife between Emperor and Pope, to rescue his feudatories from the power of the Guelf townsmen, and to restore such a power as Charlemagne had welded and Hildebrand had broken.

273-283. Sordello and Palma sit 'in linked sweetness.'

In the palace Sordello and Palma sat together. They spoke little, though in spite of the din in the market-place they exchanged quick, low laughs. Some significant sign of colour, eye, or lip would call forth an answer in rapid words, but for the most part they exchanged their sympathies through pressure of arm and fingers. So the night wore on till one of Palma's retinue burst in to report that Verona was about to declare formally its support of the Lombard League. When the two leaned from the window of the chamber a balcony lay black beneath them, but soon it was a-glare with torches, and grey-haired men stood upon it and harangued the crowd, who thereupon surged to and fro and cried: "Haul forth the carroch! Sound the trumpets! Back from the bell and avoid the hammer's strokes! Let all it may concern know that the League is rising to work, and that Verona will not be the first to desert it on the morrow!"

284-303. Then watch the signs of battle.

Now look over the cypresses to the east of the city and see if any beacon is alight.

Even the clang of the carroch's bell was overpowered by the people's shouts. "Hasten!" they cried. "Let each soldier keep his time at the gateway and stand there armed, ready to march with Tiso Sampier through its eastern arch. Ferrara's succoured, Palma!"

261. 'appears Verona.' See Bk. I., ll. 309-345.
262. 'the osprey's.' Taurello Salinguerra's. Bk. I., l. 128
263. 'lynx and ounce.' Azzo and Boniface. Bk. I, l. 166.

270. 'disengage His barons.' History tells us that the power of the Imperial party in Lombardy had sunk low at this time.

284. '"Now, Lady!"' The servant seems to have been appointed to report when the grey-haired men were about to harangue the people.

290. 'the carroch.' See note on Bk. I., l. 317.

291. 'the ancient grooves.' Is this to be taken literally?

302. 'Tiso Sampier.' See Bk. IV., l. 614.

303. 'Ferrara's succoured, Palma!' Is this a jeer from the crowd? It cannot belong to Palma — unless it express the thought that rises within her; which is improbable, since she neither wishes the city relieved nor speaks afterwards as though she feared it would be. Did Sordello say it?

## Ll. 303-359.

*As they sit together again, Palma tells Sordello of her all-commanding love for him. To her he is the partial revelation, sufficient to dominate her whole heart and intellect, of an infinite and otherwise inscrutable mind.*

**303-321. Palma tells Sordello that she had waited for one who would claim her whole being;**

That some strange thing Palma had to say appeared from the coy, fastidious manner—like the flutter of a bird ere it settles to feed—in which she found her place again beside Sordello. But once she held him safe she spoke freely. He had not been the only one at Goito with a great want waiting to be satisfied. The single thing of moment to her was that she should serve him, as he was the one to be served—so had the ministering spirit inherited from her mother Agnes of Este neutralised the domineering nature of the Ecelins. While Sordello would fain have made all nature worship him, Palma was waiting for some controlling soul. For long it dawned not upon her, but she waited still, though love and thought were kept uncultivated for want of their proper lord. "Every rule of my life," she said, "its capacities, my faults, must be determined by one whose bodily form would be the revelation to me of one part of an infinite mind—a mind inscrutable except in so far as

**321-349. That her lover was to be an emanation of the Divine mind;**

I could feel it calling forth my powers by causing me to perceive what human shape should guide me—what mortal lip should declare to me its oracles—what fleshly garb would be worn by its intimation of, first, whom I was to love, and then of how I was to love him. That part-revelation of the great orb seemed slow to dawn upon my Goito life, but no other worship would I admit. Any endowments of mine that tempted me for a moment to cherish interests of my own were checked: I was determined to keep my heart untouched till the consummating spell should be laid upon me. Never did I lose hope of the appearing of my beloved. 'Surely he will come soon,' I always said; 'in the fresh births of spring-time he will appear.'

**349-359. And that he was recognised in Sordello.**

"And on that April morning, at Richard's Love-court at Mantua, he came. It was time—so white and listless was I as I sat at Adelaide's feet and absently said what she prompted. Then suddenly from all the faces out burst yours. I had seen it before—how had it become mingled with the glooms of the maple chamber at Goito? —but my recognition of you as one embodying for me the great mind's claim was confirmed when men acknowledged and acclaimed your marvellous poetic gifts."

313. 'Agnes.' See note on Bk. I., l. 942.

322. 'every flaw.' What she is to recognise as a flaw.

333. 'the first of intimations.' Only one being is meant. He was to be the Will's intimation to Palma of two things: he is the man she is called upon to love, and will tell her how to love him. Read: "what fleshly garb the (first of) intimations would wear."

336. 'beneath it.' Beneath "the castle-covert and the mountain-close"?

340. 'jetting.' Thrusting itself forward. (Fr. *jeter*, 'to throw.' Compare 'flotsam and jetsam.')

350. 'Of Richard's Love-court.' See Bk. II., l. 39 f.

355. 'where in maple chamber glooms.' See Bk. I., l. 752.

## Ll. 359-427.

*Palma proceeds to tell Sordello how, when it seemed impossible to marry him and make him head of the House of Romano, two barriers were broken down by the death of Adelaide and the withdrawal of Ecelin to a monastery.*

359-376. Palma tells Sordello how Adelaide used to plot at Goito,

"Adelaide was always silently busy with her plots. She had to manage her husband Ecelin, who from time to time threatened to give up the fight. 'Cesano baffles me,' he would say, 'and I would Ferrara were drowned in its own marshes—and you and Taurello too. What's our business there?' But with an hour's talk she would 'screw his courage to the sticking-point' once more, and he would agree to go on with what she proposed, and would be instructed how to do it. Then again she would sit and lay schemes in anticipation of the next emergency, while I longed to see you in power and have leave from you to direct Taurello—to bid him be now sharply on the alert, now inactive. But what chance did there seem of making you mine and Romano's? Even if I could have got rid of its chief, Ecelin, and of his two sons, Taurello Salinguerra would have been dead against me, and Adelaide also would have blocked the way.

376-397. Of her death,

But one stormy evening, when Taurello was at Naples, my father at Padua, and Ecelin and Alberic away in anger, she died in her lonely chamber, with none beside her but myself. Holding me with a clutch that made our very spirits touch, she began flinging up ugly things that had lain in the dark recesses of her soul—deeds and dreams, bits of miserable schemes, and secret after secret, till—yes! she told me, as she gathered up her face into one last awful grimace—she told me how——

397-427. And how Ecelin II. became a monk.

"Friend, it has gone from me; but never will her frightful laugh cease to ring in my ears. Her voice had not begun to falter, nor did her heart seem to be growing weak, when she suddenly ceased to speak,

and was gone, as if to serve the purpose of her husband, who at that moment burst in, looking as though her death were a welcome release for him. 'Girl,' he said to me, 'how am I to manage Este in connection with this Ferrara business, which was no seeking of mine? How am I to unravel your bad coil?—yes, yours, for I see in your face that you were a plotter along with her. But, after all, you needn't give me your advice,' he hurried on. He had signed no pact, he said, with devils like us, and had had nothing to do with treason in this place or in that, with Goito or with Vicenza. He would bury the past deep down with Adelaide, and would slave no longer for the sake of any Frederick or Taurello. What profit was there to him from interfering with the affairs of Lombardy? Afterwards I understood why he promised to undo the work of Adelaide—why he arranged certain marriages, made new friends, and paid off his old ones with curses; for one day, passing out by gate Saint Blaise, he stopped short in Vicenza and became a monk. Nearly thirty years ago, as he explained, he had vowed to give his life to God and his wealth to the Church because at that very place his wife and child had been rescued from the jaws of death."

361. 'Cesano.' Cesena?

369. 'its exigent of wit.' The necessary amount of understanding for the enterprise.

373. 'to con your horoscope.' Cp. Bk. IV., l. 602.

374. 'those steely shafts.' His eyes?

379. 'Tread o'er the ruins of the Chief.' No one can deny that Palma is wholly devoted to her 'point' of the orb. Only here she reminds one of Tullia and the 'vicus sceleratus.'

393. 'no, not the last.' This contradicts ll. 395-397. It would be too ingenious to interpret, 'No, I'll not tell her last secret,' Palma being understood to change her mind immediately after saying so (l. 394), and finally to leave the secret untold. What she does not tell Sordello is the truth about his parentage. See Bk. VI., l. 752 f.

408. 'a soil.' For plots to grow in.

419. 'marriages were made.' See Bk. II., ll. 883-886.

422. 'Gate Saint Blaise.' Cp. Bk. IV., l. 727.

424. 'had vowed.' See Bk. IV., l. 737.

## Ll. 427-515.

*Palma next shows Sordello how, after Adelaide's death and Ecelin's withdrawal, Taurello Salinguerra, far from proving a hindrance to her hopes, urged her to avoid alliance with the Guelfs, and to become the independent head of the House of Romano; and how he used his talents on her behalf.*

427-515. Palma tells Sordello further how Taurello,

"At Goito I dreamed ever and only of how I might serve the orb that had dawned upon me in you. Should I make your destiny one with that of the Romano House? Its guardian angel, Taurello, appeared beside me. Had he not come I should now have been Count Boniface's bride. It was he who, with head bent low and voice subdued, as if he had come to learn from me, not to teach me, withdrew the veil from the past history of our House, and showed me how it had grown at first and was now threatened with decline, and explaining why, if I relaxed my grasp, it would go to pieces of itself, while every false step was being blindly counted a step forward in its fortunes. Romano was established: why, then, go back and do what it was good to do only at the beginning of its history? At first it gained strength by making alliance with other Lombard Houses.

445-479. Explaining by what means Ecelo had established the House of Romano,

That, properly, was the chief concern of its founder, Ecelo, who followed Conrad into Italy with one steed for all his wealth. He had a hazardous task to perform —as hazardous as our proper course could be—but did he despair when he came from his rougher clime into the clear and spicy air of the Trevisan and saw the House of Este? Did the stout Suabian feel that he could never win anything of Lombard grace? No; his heart said: 'Study Este, and study yourself. What is nature? Custom—anything will come through practice. A third part of your strength is sufficient to your need here; let the other two-thirds be a balance to the good,

and devote your energies to acquiring a stock of Italian refinement.' So Ecelo was strong as ever when his palace was being built in Padua, but even the noblest of its citizens began to note in him a grace that was lacking in the rest of Conrad's crew.

479-498. Urged her to strengthen it by a method proper to her own time,

"'Thus Romano,' continued Taurello, 'was established, and has remained too; for is it not now an Italian House, equal to the House of Este? Does Este's name *Azzo* sound better than our *Alberic;* or is this lion's mane'—he meant my yellow hair—'so poor a graft on Agnes Este's type? Why shrink, then, from imitating what was the model House to Ecelo, and the one he was keen to rival? That House ceased long ago to be a merely local one: it has had the Pope to cover and support it. Now, attach your cause to the Emperor, whom Ecelin is letting go—or rather will not be allowed to let go if only you, like Ecelo, make Romano's growth, which is no longer of interest to your father, your chief concern. As Adelaide of Susa, having bestowed Piedmont upon the Pope, that it might command him a doorway in the Alps, increased its importance by handing it over to Matilda of Tuscany, so close a friend of Rome's; so, lest our Adelaide's counter-project of giving the Trentine to the Emperor for a passage between Germany and Italy should fail now that she is dead, you must take it up. Romano must be strong on the Kaiser's side, and I freely give you my plodding talent to further this aim.'

498-515. And how Taurello plotted to this end.

"As patron of our scattered family, Taurello took me to Mantua, and kept in circulation the report of alliances with Azzo of Este and of Boniface's suit to me until, when the Emperor was excommunicated, he said: 'We have only to wait some rash procedure on the part of the Guelfs. They were cautious through fear of offending Ghibellins like us and losing you, but, now that Frederick's power is weakened by the excommunication, they will not scruple to attack us and try to seize you. And you may guess whether an alliance with Este, such

as your father made in marrying Agnes, would now be likely to strengthen Romano!' So, on the day on which I was betrothed to Boniface at Padua by Taurello himself, was done the rash work of the Guelfs at Ferrara—the very thing Taurello had hoped would follow from his absence, to give him a good excuse for establishing himself firmly in that city. Again, he arranged that I should arrive at Verona immediately after Boniface, tired of waiting for us, had left for the siege, and thus the Count was made to appear as though he were not at all anxious to have our betrothal confirmed: when our marriage fell through, the blame would fall upon him.

430. 'Fomalhaut.' A star. Why is it used to denote Palma's 'bright, particular star'?

447. 'late allied.' By Ecelin II.'s marriage with Agnes Este.

475. 'crine.' Lat. *crinis*, 'hair.'

488. 'Adelaide of Susa.' Marchioness of Susa, in Piedmont. That she bequeathed her possessions to Matilda of Tuscany seems to be unhistorical.

492. 'Matilda's perfecting.' Matilda, the wealthy and warlike Countess of Tuscany, and the devoted supporter of Gregory VII. She died in 1115. (Sismondi's *Hist. des Rep. Ital.*; Milman's *Latin Christianity*, &c.)

499. 'his Mantua.' See Bk. II., ll. 916-921.

500. 'Azzo's alliances.' See Bk. II., ll. 882-886.

## Ll. 515-551.

*Palma, who is armed with Monk Ecelin's reply to Taurello's last appeal not to let Romano go down, next informs Sordello that she intends to act meantime as head of the House, retain Taurello's services, and make Sordello leader of the Ghibellin cause.*

**515-528. Palma next reveals to Sordello Taurello's appeal to Monk Ecelin**

"Now, what glory may come to you through these events? When, a month ago, that poor remnant of an Ecelin slunk into a monk, Taurello could not so far forget his liege lord of thirty years as not to try

to win him back to interest in Romano's fortunes. He accordingly sent him an account of his doings at Ferrara, and declared that, in spite of this foolish convent business, he still recognised his old employer's right to order his Salinguerra. Was he, then, to wring the greatest possible advantage out of the affair, or to fling the chance away? Or were the sons, Ecelin and Alberic, the head now, and entitled to give him his orders? I took Taurello's missive to Ecelin, and now I carry back Ecelin's reply. Look at it! He has no concern, he says, with fighting; and just as little have his children with any fresh plots of the Emperor. The past is done with—Taurello will no longer serve, Ecelin no longer order. Now, lest this answer unnerve Taurello at this critical point and make him slip his chance by releasing Count Richard too easily, I, in default of the sons, who, instead of trying to overwhelm Este, are mingling with it, assume the headship of Romano and give Taurello authority to make the most of his present advantage. I will disguise myself in a minstrel's garb like yours, and by noon to-morrow we two, regardless of the rising of the League on behalf of the Count, may reach Ferarra before the arbitrators; and, if only we get to Taurello, his noble words will teach all else you need to know. Say, then, if I have misconceived your destiny, and have been too ready to believe that the Emperor's cause is your own!"

528-534. And Ecelin's reply,

534-551. And makes herself head of Romano for Sordello.

517. 'a month since.' Eleven months after Adelaide's death (Bk. v., l. 750).

538. 'as the frith.' Surely a poor illustration.

539. 'firmland.' Supply 'which.'

547. 'the arbitrators.' The envoys of the Lombard League and the Imperial legate?

## Ll. 551-592.

*Through Palma's revelations Sordello, who shortly before had cried out at Goito for the slightest contact with actual life, is led to believe that, after all, he will find in men a splendid use: his all-powerful mind will mould their actions as he desires.*

**551-592. Palma's narrative inspires Sordello with the new idea of lording it over men.**

Palma has fled from the palace chamber. Sordello makes no assenting motion, his head remaining still while the flickering light of the dying lamp falls and rises upon it, until, at break of morn, he resolves to be the very core of Lombardy's life—the soul of its mass of men—able to bind them to all his purposes, even though he should live to be the object of their deadliest hate.

Thus I have traced Sordello's history till I have brought him again to the rapturous cry he uttered when the shouting of the crowd in Verona's street broke his meditation on Palma's words. The first round of his life was completed. Not only had he learned that a soul cannot be sufficient to its own delight—cannot live by showing itself off—since it lacks bodily organs to realise its conceptions in action, and that it cannot reveal these conceptions to men even through language; but, after his last and severest struggle, which he made to silence, or depose, his richly gifted mind, he had found that it refused to be silenced or deposed. So he had concluded that it might remain enthroned and reign through finding a use in men, though they would not, as he had hoped at first, recognise and worship the perfection of his nature, and could not — since the joys of actual life became absorbingly satisfactory in themselves—afford him mere detached and transitory delights from which to extract the essence.

If thus mankind were to be recalled from their exile

from Sordello's interest, their proper service of him being that he should make them act, not that they should watch him acting — if thus the true crown of life seemed almost placed upon his head while he drank in the wise words of Palma of the golden hair—you may thank Verona's Lady in her citadel, which was founded by Brennus the Gaul. And truly, when she left the palace chamber, the sun reared over the eastern horizon a head like the head of the first besieger who, his face burning bright with triumph, peered over the wall of the Capitol at Rome (though his triumph ceased when Manlius came!).

553. 'a dying lamp-flame.' Bk. I., l. 329.

554. 'alighted planet.' Why 'alighted'? In works of art Castor and Pollux (the Dioskouroi) are represented as each wearing an egg-shaped helmet surmounted by a star.

559. 'a centre of disgust.' This is no doubt to be taken 'objectively.' Sordello at this stage means to force men to work out his conceptions, and as yet he has the idea that most men are grand creatures. See l. 575, and Bk. IV., l. 185 f.

562. 'the rapturous Exclaim.' Which he uttered when he felt that after all he had another chance of real life by becoming the dominating power over the crowd.

577. 'to render incidentally.' See Bk. II., l. 532 f.

580. 'exile of mankind.' Into which they were sent by Sordello's withdrawal to Goito.

587. 'Verona's Lady.' "This water-supply" (for the fountain in the Piazza delle Erbe) "is surmounted by a statue in Greek marble known as 'Madonna Verona.' According to an inscription now preserved in the Museo Lapidario, this statue was placed in its present position in the days of the Emperor Theodosius (380)." ("The Story of Verona" in Dent's *Mediæval Towns.*)

Why 'in her citadel'?

588. 'Brennus.' Who defeated the Romans at the battle of Allia (390), and marched upon the city. As the Gauls tried to scale the Capitol, Manlius, wakened by the cackling of the sacred geese, hurled down the leading climber.

## Ll. 593-607.

*Browning suddenly threatens to bring* Sordello *down about our ears.*

593-606. *Sordello* threatens to flutter down like a magician's tree.

Now, do not despise too much my rhymes, which rise and hover over us like a band of angels. Or call my poem rather a miraculous plane-tree, which, growing up like that of an arch-magician seeking to please some young queen with a specimen of his art, shows first a silvery trunk, anon bright branches, next thick foliage, soon coloured buds, and then is all one mild flame like the light of the moon. At last there comes a pause; the tree bursts, and showers down over her ivory limbs in bits of bloom and fruit and leaf. The old wizard, decrepit and stiff, is not much interested, but watches her delight——

593. 'that spring, dispread.' Cp. Bk. I., l. 881.
603. 'flinders.' Small fragments. Cp. Bk. VI., l. 100.

## The Remainder of Book the Third.

*After writing so much of* Sordello, *Browning, in* 1838, *went to Italy. The remainder of the Third Book is devoted to recording his meditation at Venice on what is to be the purpose of his poetry. He feels himself 'called,' like one of the prophets; and he is called to be the poet of suffering humanity: he must write to help man to live truly.*

*This makes him change his intention with regard to the rest of Sordello's story. What will finally lay hold of his hero's soul will be, not merely some interest outside of himself, whatever its moral quality, but what conscience tells him is a good cause. God*

> *"selects our yoke,*
> *Sordello, as your poetship may find"* (l. 782).

## Ll. 607-615.

*But Browning does not abandon his poem. He will, however, pause a little to reflect.*

607-615. But it does not: only Browning pauses to meditate on his poetry.

But no! I will not let my poem go to pieces here. Only it were well I should pause and indulge in a little personal meditation. Let me go to Venice. I bid myself put aside my collection of characters—put a spell upon them, as a god may glide out of his world and quietly, after what men reckon countless ages, enter into it again and set it working exactly where it left off. My puppets sleep, and I awake at Venice.

615. 'being at Venice.' See Mrs Sutherland Orr's *Life and Letters of Robert Browning*, ch. vii.

## Ll. 615-675.

*Some poets have fixed and final ideas, which represent all they can learn. Poets of true genius, on the other hand, are always greater than anything they express; so that neither need we look for complete autobiography in their songs, nor can we conclude that in the future they will not express something altogether different from what they have already given us.*

615-639. A poet of genius never puts the whole of himself into his poem,

In such songs as those of, say, Eglamor, who lived entirely for his poetry and believed he achieved all that could be achieved by a singer, you find completeness: the man and his poetry are one. The be all and end all of his life comes out in it, and it is the one thing for which he exists. But from works of true genius, like Sordello's (in which imagination has free play), there always escapes some little hint that the bard's own personal life lies below the life depicted in his songs, the latter being only a kind of sheath to the former. His individual experience and feeling are

deeper than anything he exhibits as belonging to his poetic characters. Of this you had evidence in some small irrelevancy, which showed a bit of Sordello's personal ideas jutting up through his lay. In his *Charlemagne*, for instance, a work splendidly conceived, there was the skit, or scoff, about the Emperor's daughters. It had no business there, and must be taken to imply something like this, as the bard might put it: "Not all my life is to be found in my poem, which is but one of its episodes. I lived before it, and shall continue to live when I cease to sing—never, perhaps, taking the trouble to set forth in song the deeper life, or dream-life, as I have done now. 'There is much in his life,' say you hearers, 'that he has not told us. When shall we read the lay on which, as that irrelevant flout betrays, he is already busy—the better lay, because in it he will speak to us, not of man's life as he observes it in others, but of his own personal experience—his own life's true business. We hope for that, although we understood he agreed to be always revealing through his poetry what life had taught him.'

639-651. And lives on into new thought and feeling,

"Alas! you may never hear that better lay. My promise to tell you all was like the promise of a weather-bound sailor. I may try to give you all the gains of my life, but, whether I will or not, I am driven on into new ideas. The sailor promises to settle down and spend his days in telling of voyages that are past. 'Here,' we say, 'let us strike sail, pay out our cable, moor our bark, and firmly pitch our tent. It is noon, and about the bank of the river all is quiet save for the wave's crisp dash, or the buzz of humming-bird, or the tortoise's splash. Now let us unlade all the spoils we took as we sailed up the stream bend after bend. Let us admire each treasure and make it remind us of our voyage's history. This speaks of groves of giant rushes, growing like a demon's hair on end; this, of mountains

652-675. As a sailor is bound to go sailing again.

stretching lazily above us; this, of the forests that seemed suddenly to open out their sombre sides to yield us passage—— May that beetle (shake it off your cap) mean that wind is springing from the west?'"

Why, sailor, do you ask? Because you cannot but be off again. You tell us your travel-tales to-day, but to-morrow we part company. Onward you go eastward on your voyage, and no other man can go with you or know what fate reserves for you in the land to which you fare.

The poet goes forward into new thoughts and feelings whither we cannot follow: will he tell us them in song, or be for ever silent?

635. 'the restiff daughters.' They were a bad lot.

642. 'o' the deeper life.' These words would naturally mean the same as 'the singer's proper life . . . 'neath the life his song exhibits' (l. 625), but an interpretation on this understanding is rendered impossible by all that follows. Another great difficulty is this: that, as the sailor (l. 651 f.) passes in review objects he has really collected, the poet of true genius should be understood to sing what comes out of his own past, whereas he gives a 'dream-performance.' The general interpretation, no doubt, is that of the text—that a genius cannot continue to live without conceiving new ideas. It is not in *Sordello* alone that Browning displays a satanic power of ambiguity.

## Ll. 675-696.

*Browning, as he perceives when he reaches Italy, has lived on into new thoughts and feelings: will he express them as far as poet can? 'Who,' he asks, 'will give me the fresh inspiration necessary for the completion of my poem?' Watching healthy peasant-girls at work and at play in Venice, he wonders which of them would best draw him out and quicken his powers.*

676-696. Which healthy picturesque

So I meditate as I sit on a ruined palace-step at Venice. And why should I not continue to muse and bring to completion this poem, begun in England?

peasant-girl will inspire Browning to continue *Sordello?*

Who is adorable enough to give fresh inspiration to my mind — not, alas! a mind like Sordello's, that most wonderful of poets? Who will be queen to me, to draw forth devotion enough to create more verses? Will that girl from Bassano, who busies herself among her fruit-boats? Perhaps these from delicious Asolo, who are quick and pretty in their motions as pigeons above the portico, and are binding June lilies, soiled with their gold pollen, to deck the bridge-side chapel with? Ah! but the one with brownest cheeks — the one stooping beneath the arch — she might charm me for a month or so: shall I continue my story for her sake? Nay, a still better queen would be that Paduan girl who splashes with barer legs where a whirl of water in the dead black Giudecca shows that drifting sea-weed has pulled down all but one of the blue-turbaned posts for fastening gondolas to.

693. 'Giudecca.' The Canal della Giudecca, an island of Venice.

### Ll. 696-783.

*Suddenly a worn and sorrowful ghost, most unlike these healthy girls, makes her presence known. It is Suffering Humanity. Previous ideas of the poet's attitude to life are abandoned. Here is his true queen. He has not chosen her, but she has chosen him, and her claim is irresistible.*

696-738. Browning explains that his poetry had originally intended to regard happiness as the natural condition of human life.

You sad, dishevelled ghost, who pluck at me and point at these peasant girls, do you know I am alive as I sit so quietly here? Let them alone with their happiness. (Let alone even that one disguised, now wearing jewels in her hair, which really prefers nothing to a coronet made from the field-buds and spikes of green wheat of her native land—who left behind her there the turmoil of the end of June, shook off pomp, except for a gem or two, as a lily shakes off its gold pollen, and came to join the peasants here.) You feel they look too happy

and gaily clad, while you are miserable and poor? But you must confess that there is too little happiness to stretch out over the whole human family. Let the robe of happiness be cut up, and be content that the pieces be distributed among a score or so, because, if these be acknowledged happy, it shows there is such a thing as happiness in the world, and gives you something to aim at for the rest. Seeing these peasant girls, I can imagine all creatures gay and joyous like themselves. This is what I ask now for the race. 'Let us,' I say, 'have every one strong and healthy.' I have grown wise enough to limit my prayer to that. At home in England I meant to claim that all were intended to excel in mind as in body—each at once chief and poet; but Venice teaches me a lesson on the subject. It is a type of life. As it lies a stripe between blue expanses of water, so the Something called Life lies between nothing and nothing; and you might as well try to save my treading any slippery stones on the Square, or to make me sail on only the clean canals, as keep me from coming across evil as well as good in life. Only do, I say to myself, work out some idea into a complete poem! For the credit of our race, show that most of us are happy, whatever we may assert to be the source of their happiness, and give assurance that the wretched creatures we send to crouch in hidden corners have somehow chanced to miss the joy for which they were naturally formed.

738-771. But the ghost, Suffering Humanity, irresistibly claims him as her bard.

This was the idea I had just adopted in the course of my musing, and here your coming baulks it already! Scarcely have I begun to arrange happiness of some kind or other for the majority of mankind when you, pale and suffering One, find me; and in your presence such a theory of life immediately stands exposed. And to think that, while I am so sure about your being my queen, you should distrust me! Yet you have reason; for many who have meant to devote themselves to your service have grown weary of your thin trembling lips and your lashless tear-shot eyes. Stop! I mean you

no insult. Remember I am not your slave, that I should be afraid of you; your friend I am, and must speak out. Besides, to me you are really more interesting and attractive — in fact, I had always a secret sympathy with the broken and unfortunate — than Happy Humanity, who—as I thought when, years ago, far across the sea in England, there came a whisper bidding me take the whole human race as the mistress to whom I should devote myself heart and soul in song —would be my goddess in the temple of earth. You may guess now that I had a premonition that you would claim me. Rough fellow that I am, with loose garments and a few odd ornaments, I saunter through Venice careless and alone, giving out chance bits of song; but, passing all the grand folk, you come to me for help. And then what a luxury I enjoy when I hesitate, and pretend that to give you aught is an unexampled grace; whereas I simply dare not withhold my gifts, which I feel are destined for your service!

**771-783.** Whereat, as one whose duty is made plain, he rejoices.

To tell the truth, I am not much grieved that Humanity, who appeared at first to me as bright and happy, and about to step upon a pedestal, seems now, in this silent city, to fall toward me in very weakness. No wreath is hers: she only weeps herself to rest upon my breast. Strange it is, Humanity, that experience should have so changed my earlier youth's idea of what thou art! Warped souls and bodies—such, in truth, are men. It was otherwise, and more pleasantly, that I had thought to use my poetic powers; but this way my duty lies, and at all costs it must be done. Other things I may desire for my art, but I 'cut them off.' Yes, Sordello, God selects our poetic yoke, as you may find before your day is done!

698. 'e'en her disguised.' The girl who is the emblem Humanity as Great and Happy (l. 719). In England Browning expected she would be queen to him and inspire his poetry (l. 750), and now she mingles with the light-hearted Italians who are the emblems of Life as Happy on the whole (l. 721).

738. 'Fastuous.' Proud. (Lat. *fastuosus*, *fastosus* — from *fastus*, 'pride.')

746. 'shent.' Harshly rebuked.

> "How in my words soever she be shent."
>
> —*Hamlet*, Act III. sc. ii.

> "Right sore I fear lest with unworthy blames
> This odious argument my rymes should shend."
>
> —*The Faerie Queene*, Canto IX.

750. 'her I looked should foot.' Humanity as Great and Happy. Browning does not contrast the joyous portion of humanity with the miserable portion. It was an early purpose to devote his poetry to the service of man ('thy race'): he has to decide whether he will regard him as a being essentially grand and gladsome, or as happy on the whole, or as one in whose soul great suffering of some kind dwells. In the paraphrase the two aspects are for convenience entitled Happy Humanity and Suffering Humanity, between the two being Humanity Happy on the whole. The full stop at the end of the line is impossible punctuation.

755. 'had I.' As you came along?

759. 'slouch bonnet.' Browning is describing himself as the Untidy Poet, his style being the garments.

766. 'Corpus Domini.' Or Corpus Christi, the greatest festival of the R.C. Church, held in honour of the consecrated host.

782. 'Of right-hand, foot and eye.' Matt. v. 29-31. To be the poet of Suffering Humanity, as duty bids him, Browning must sacrifice a good deal that one expects to find in poetry, and, consequently, a measure of popularity.

'selects our yoke.' Yet we are told to beware of imagining that Browning had a 'message.' His readers know how he remained true to his purpose of being the poet of 'warped souls and bodies.'

## Ll. 784-832.

*Such poetic work for the race is not vain. The worst of men is not beyond hope, since, amid all his evil, he retains at least the idea of truth; and the only way in which the poet may help him is, while honestly recognising the hardness of life, to show him wherein the true good of his nature lies, and the way to reach it.*

Sleep, then, upon my shoulder, Suffering Humanity,

784-804. No man is beyond hope of restoration.

and never mind those who talk of evil men beyond hope. Say to such: "Doesn't each manage to secure a kind of life in spite of his evil? Amid all his lies, does he not retain his own idea of what is the one true thing for him? All his dishonest conduct is only the way, which you don't understand, by which he seeks what he takes to be his good. When he did wrong, some good he fancied ought to be his afforded a secret excuse for doing it: he was surely entitled to secure by hook or by crook one pleasure out of all that the world denied him." Then you might say that from this it would appear that a man must think all other men better than himself, since he takes for granted that, though he is injuring them in seeking his object, they will not injure him; but don't say that. Explain his conduct thus: "Each thinks all others less sharp than he is, he alone, as he fancies, being able to see how an evil course will lead to good—to understand the complicated scheme by which he does 'evil that good may come.'"

804-825. Your drawing-room-table poet only makes things worse.

But it's no great help, one may object, merely to know the disease of which you are dying and nothing else. Well, perhaps we can do a little more; but, in any case, let us not pretend that life, after all, is not so bad. The worst thing we can do is to increase our ignorance tenfold by hinting again and again that it would be easy to put the world right—that it would be a specially easy task if we only took the trouble to discover the source of evil. "In the meantime," says the poet that gives such brilliant advice, "just listen to my pretty little song about the dewdrop in the mugwort." What, you blockhead! Here we are in life's parching wilderness, in which we seem shut up without hope of escape; and now, when we are crying out for the very necessities of the soul, you come with your dainty little pieces on out-of-the-way subjects, and wonder why we are making such a to-do! You should be stoned! And meanwhile here is a bard who is in terrible earnest and does some good in his own clumsy way—who strikes the rock and

826-832. The helpful poet looks life in the face.

brings a real supply of water—though for his pains he forgo the promised land of popularity, have his carcass claimed by Satan, and be jeered at as a metaphysical poet. It is hard work: "Strife!" But genuine water begins to ooze forth; then, when men are really being helped, yourself among the number, tell me who explained what it was best to do.

815. 'the mugwort.' The *Artemisia vulgaris.* It was called 'mugwort' because it was used to give a bitter flavour to drink. It has a red rough stem, and grows to a height of from two to four feet. (See Step's *Wayside and Woodland Blossoms.*)

817. 'Zin.' Numbers, ch. xx.

825. 'With founts about.' Are the founts the Potiphar-tales and Ass-sonnets? The madrigal on the mugwort with the dew-drop should be a source of refreshment also, but, if it is, what is the force of 'meantime'?

'Gibeonites.' What had they to do with potsherding?

828. 'have Satan claim.' Jude, ver. 9.

829. 'as Metaphysic Poet.' Is there a reference here, or has the illustrative Moses turned into Browning?

830. 'Meribah.' Numbers, ch. xx. Cp. Exod. xvii. 7.

## Ll. 833-861.

*Human society is not a machine in working order: we do not understand what the present scheme of things is aiming at. The machine is only being fitted together in preparation for producing certain results in another life.*

833-861. Human society is a machine in process of construction.

"But it is presumptuous," some one interrupts, "to claim such a high function for any poet." But I don't really claim much. It is you, my brother, who marvel at and magnify such office. "Office," say you? Why, my work is scarcely entitled to such a name. What are we doing in this life? We are simply experimenting on one another's powers, and wondering how matters would go if, say, you and I changed places. In fact, we are only watching human society being built up like a machine. In the case of a finished one, our whole concern is with the work it can do; but at present,

without knowing what the whole structure is meant to accomplish, we see it gradually growing into shape. We have some conception of different men's abilities, but how these should be fitted to one another, and for what purpose they are to be so fitted, is beyond our ken. We die; that is to say, the whole complex machine is removed from earth and is built up in a world of clearer atmosphere than that of ours, to do the work for which it is intended. Then we shall have nothing to do with how the machine works, or how it is fitted up; but that is what for a long time must take up our attention here. And, while you turn away impatiently from my discourse, pray that I do not die and be found busy in a better land at my nature's true work before I point out a tenth of the human faculties whose use I mean to explain.

835. 'such office.' It is difficult to reconcile this whole passage with Sordello's claim (Bk. v.) that the poet is essentially king of men.

843. 'yet in probation.' Not only from l. 848, but from the general drift of what follows, we see this engine cannot represent the individual. That we are ourselves the machine and at the same time watch its erection is intelligible enough, but there are one or two perplexing points in the description :—

1. The engine grows by quarters and by halves—which ought to be quick work.
2. It accomplishes nothing here below, yet the machine of human society must certainly move, and the poem afterwards insists that the true bard is the man who makes others act.
3. Part of it is suddenly added (?) to the heavenly engine, and forthwith begins a task. (Ll. 857-861 would naturally apply to the individual who, after this life's probation, has learned how to work his faculties to some purpose.)

The moral is that, trusting in the final good of all, each man should be sure of his present task.

## Ll. 862-1023.

*The poet's office is simply to make men see what they have not observed for themselves. As long as we live, we shall be in the dark with reference to the purpose of human life*

*as a whole, but it is his to help us by making us see where and with what limitations—as, for example, in the case of his own poetry—our powers should be applied in the circumstances in which we are set. We must never seek to understand the whole meaning of life, or to do all we think ourselves fit for, but must rest content with 'the duty that lies nearest' us. To understand Sordello is to learn this lesson; therefore we had better not despise the strange character Browning has portrayed in his hero.*

**862-912. A poet of the highest order makes us see with his eyes.**

So men are occupied; and the office of us poets, whose business it is to observe human life, has been, and for long will be—for the worst of us, to state what they see; for the better, to show how life has appeared to them; and, for the best, to make other men see what they see.

**872-882. He reveals to us that a prisoner may be not merely a man with prison thoughts.**

"I glance around," says one of the last order, "and every face I behold has in it a secret history that I can read. Here I see the hope of one man's soul; there, the fear of another's. I can imagine, too, what, in given circumstances, a man might say. A prisoner, for example, is to most minds a prisoner and nothing more: there is nothing for him, they think, but gloom; but I can picture his thoughts as going forth to days of happy liberty. 'Stoop,' I hear him say, 'else the hazel-branches with their nuts will blind thee. Is not that what I said? And this time—how plainly I see her now!—she shuts both eyes now, because the hazels meet so close. Thus, imprisoned in the Piombi, I keep repeating, over and over again, what happened during one day's roving through the wood with thee, my beloved, and so put thy sweet shape between me and madness. More hazel-boughs again! Therefore stoop.'

"'That's the very thing the incarcerated youth would say,' you answer, now that I have shown it you.

**882-902. That a pastoral poet may live in a horribly ugly town.**

"Or suppose the youth to be Plara the bard. I might tell you that he spent his youth in a grim town whose streets were huddled close about the minster, which kept them ever in shade and filled them with the clang-

ing of its bells. The more brightly the sun shone on the suburbs, the more ugly was the reproof administered by the gloom if any chance bit of brightness, which some roof taller than the others caught and allowed them to behold, ventured to come before the day's single regulation-laugh of light (if one could think that such a repulsive gleam was meant for laughter) was permitted, as it was when the sun, filling the space between the two belfry-peaks, turned it into a fiery wedge, and then, like the flame of a huge candle burnt down to its socket-edge, sank, leaving for a few minutes longer a ghastly light on the grey oriel-pane. And a dusty place it was! Now there lived Plara, who wrote sonnets on the fairest of rural scenes.

"'That's an exact description of the minster and its streets,' you answer, now that I have shown you them.

903-912. That mirth denotes success and sadness defeat, apart from moral quality.

"Now, I will show another thing. All mirth signifies triumph; all sadness signifies defeat. Sometimes lust triumphs, as you see from its being gay. Sometimes pure love is triumphed over—fails to attain its object—and is sad. Here I see a sad man, Lucio. Now, I said a moment ago, 'Love is triumphed over and is sad'; but when I said 'Lucio's sad,' it did not necessarily follow that he was sad because a pure love in him had been defeated: his sadness, representing defeat, arises from the fact that the object of his lust had escaped the snare he laid to catch it. Another man, hoping for the enjoyment of a pure love, may be as full of joy as Lucio is of sadness; whereas in Lucio mirth would have signified that he had succeeded in lust. I speak of the mood—mirth or melancholy — and of what gives it colour, whether it be a good moral quality or an evil one.

"'Yes,' you answer, now that I have shown it you, 'it is success in what a man aims at, whatever the moral quality of the desire may be, that is represented by mirth, and defeat in his aim is represented by sadness.'

912-916. Accept a truth on the poet's authority.

"Indeed! You understand all that, do you? Well, having seen what I saw and have shown to you, be bold enough to accept on trust, and believe as a truth, what

I, as I am certain, see, though I may not be able to make it clear to you."

916-937. The world would miss the poet or 'maker-see.'

But what, some one will say, is the use of such revelations? Alas! the world is not so foolish when it metes out more praise to its Salinguerras than to its Sordellos. The men of action may see but little, but they apply in a practical manner what they do see; whereas the seers only report that the deeds of the present are but a continuation of a work begun in earlier ages. In fact, when genuine poets act out their own conceptions, the millennium will have come!

Meanwhile, where is the harm of keeping poets to their business? They are missed when they do not sing: it seems then as though heaven had ceased to have anything to do with earth. Practical men, indeed, ought to visit any neglect severely upon the seers, whose business it is to open the windows from time to time and let the world receive some fresh ideas. As a poet conscious of this, I have devised this character Sordello, and now I ask you, my audience gathered from among the living and the dead, to make of him what you will. You have invented characters of your own, and you may compare him with them when my portraiture is complete; and then!—— Perhaps you will turn upon me for offering such a creation; and if Hercules, bent on a great quest, as I think I am too, tramped through the burning sands of Egypt only to be seized and led to the altar for sacrifice, what will be done to poor me? But remember the end of the story. The demigod kept quiet till he was fully decked out as a victim, when suddenly he arose and slew his would-be sacrificers to a man. Be not offended, my audience: I only mean that there may be more in this queer creation of mine than you imagine. I would not do you injury even if I could. From my brow, Æschylus, I would not tear the chaplet which your hands have set there as a token that so far my tale has won your approval—your chaplet, my patron friend, whose great strong verse blares on in-

937-947. Sordello may turn out better than you expect.

948-967. Looking upon his audience (Bk. I., ll. 31-73), Browning addresses the dead Æschylus

cessantly like the blasts of your trumpeter at Marathon —you who, when the inspiration of Platæa and Salamis was exhausted, were content to find your poetic impulse in Ætna. And therein you did well, as I acknowledged last month when the mount loomed over the Mediterranean, lay all day shrouded in mist, and was lost at even in the blazing light of the setting sun, while clouds pressed toward it like Persian ships at Salamis. Friend, may you wear a wreath worthy of your poetic genius, while I declare that, if I had a ruby precious enough to wring tears of blood from the king who lost it, I would fling it away to win that smile of approval you gave me, which went to my very heart, and would be content to wear your verse as a charm against all care and fret.

**968-975. And the live Miss Haworth.**

My English Eyebright, if you are not glad that, when I stopped my task, the sad dishevelled ghost, into whom I put mankind that she might come to me ever and anon to remind me of my decision to finish this poem, has given me fresh inspiration for my work, may a poor springtide be yours! May no cricket chirp to you from the hedge, no glowworm show its bright spot by the riverside, and may summer be full upon you ere you have heard the thrush's song!

**976-989. Be not hasty in judging of this Sordello portrait,**

Now, then, let me go on with my poetic business, which is to describe the fate of such as find that, when they despise our common human nature, with its physical and temporal limitations, and hold it unfit to work out their conception of what a life should be, that nature will not be shaken off. Anxious to escape from the world's conditions, they at length attempt to leap beyond them, and do leap—only, however, to flounder on indefinitely, each of them a kind of god in germ, but doomed to remain a germ, and to gain nothing from life, unless——

But to show what alone will save them is just the subject of our story, which you may as well confess you are finding dull enough! To be sure, there might be

more alluring subjects for poetic treatment; still, don't misunderstand the strange character I am depicting, or make light of my quaint ornamental touches: what looks like a fiend may turn out to be a saint. If you ponder the following story of early Christian times, it will warn you not to be rash in judging my portrait of Sordello.

990-1023. As the Apostle John was when he mistook his for one of the Devil.

John the Beloved, when decree of banishment from Antioch to Patmos was passed upon him, bade farewell to his flock as a whole, but reserved the last evening for a visit of comfort to the household of Xanthus and other near friends, whom he knew his absence would most grieve. A touching spectacle it must have been to see them prepare to receive their reverend teacher at the door! Xanthus' spouse was not there, for, a month earlier, the persecutors had flung her to the wild beasts; but there were Xanthus himself (it was his nephew who was shut between boards and sawn asunder), and Polycarp, and tender Charicle, who in the following year could not be forced by torture of the wheel to swear by the Emperor's fortune. Giving his blessing right and left as he passed through the company, and stopping only once—to pat one infant's curls, destined to be soon afterwards a prey to the hangman's shears—he entered the house. What sudden twitch of pain destroys the smile about his mouth? On what are his eyes fixed that they open so wide? Why does he raise his arms and stand like a ghostly candlestick? He fell into a dead faint, wakened up anon, and, heart-broken, managed to gasp out: "Get thee behind me, Satan! Is this what all my toil has come to? Over the hearth of my son in the gospel, my own Xanthus—sooty garb and swarthy features—ah Xanthus, have I been lured beneath thy roof to see the Devil domiciled?" But Xanthus made reply amid his sobs: "It's your own portrait, Father, and we saved up hard to get it painted, that we might have it ready before you left; and that's not a twy-prong you're holding, but a pastoral cross."

The Beloved disciple's puckered brow grows smooth—and I'll go on with Sordello's story.

869. 'says such an one.' Either the interpretation from this point to l. 912 is altogether out, or the passage is a 'skit, or scoff,' on the kind of subjects often considered fit for poetic treatment.

882. 'Plara.' Cp. Bk. II., l. 769.

900. 'Tempe's.' The name of the famous valley in Thessaly came to denote any beautiful valley.

915. 'bid you take on trust.' *Sordello.* You can think about him after you hear the story, but do not resent the story because you don't 'see' it.

917. 'not so unwisely.' Unless this be ironical, as it can scarcely be after the passage beginning at l. 833, how—once more—are we to reconcile it with the kingship claimed for the poet by Sordello in Bk. v.?

939. 'If Hercules.' Busiris, King of Egypt, was advised by a prophet Thrasios, of Cyprus (who became the first victim), to sacrifice a stranger every year to ward off bad harvests. Hercules, who was passing through the land in search of the apples of the Hesperides, allowed himself to be bound, broke loose, and slew the king with all his sons and followers.

950. 'my patron-friend.' There need be no doubt this is Æschylus. His style is described as in Bk. I., ll. 65-68. For some reason not made clear the dramatist went to Sicily, and he wrote a play entitled *The Women of Ætna.*

957. 'in the blazing West.' ". . . and you can hardly conceive the strange sight when the battered hulk turned round, actually, and looked at us, and then reeled off . . . into the most gorgeous and lavish sunset in the world." (Letter to Miss Haworth—Mrs Sutherland Orr's *Life and Letters*, ch. vii.)

962. 'painted king.' Depicted in story? Polycrates, King of Samos, warned by his friend Amasis of Egypt that his unbroken prosperity would make the gods jealous, and advised to cast away what he regarded as most precious, had himself rowed out upon the sea and flung a highly treasured ring into its depths. On the seventh day thereafter a fisher presented him with a specially large fish, inside which the ring was found. Amasis broke off his friendship, and Polycrates was at last crucified in a way 'too horrible to relate.' (Herodotus, Bk. III.)

967. 'My English Eyebright.' "I called you 'Eyebright'—meaning a simple and sad sort of translation of 'Euphrasia.' . . . Shall I say Eyebright?" (Letter to Miss Haworth, as above.)

# BOOK THE FOURTH.

## Ll. 1-107.

*Turning from Verona to Ferrara, the poem pictures the awful state to which the city has been reduced through the destruction of the Ghibellin quarter by the Guelfs and the dire vengeance taken by Taurello Salinguerra on his return. We see the Lombard League arriving in great style to treat for Count Richard's release, and hear its members conversing in the public square.*

1-23. Some hard cursing at Ferrara.

MEANWHILE Ferrara lay in a most pitiful plight. As two suitors might tug at the lady for whom they contend, and drive their elbows into her ribs, and twist her hair, to leave her a corpse for the successful rival to kiss; so Guelfs and Ghibellins had been so busy tearing the city from each other's clutches that little more than a heap of ruins remained. Both sides had suffered alike. "May Boniface be damned for this!" howled an old Ghibellin, turning up the head of his little child from the heap of wet rubbish where had stood his home. "Grant me this boon, sweet Christ —let Salinguerra seethe in hell for ever, and let me be there to laugh at him!" moaned a young Guelf when he came upon his father's hand, nailed to the charred lintel of the door within which he had last seen him stand as he bade him farewell. Rank weeds were growing in the streets.

The condition of the city being so wretched, it was

**24-59. The envoys of the League arrive there in style.**

all the more strange that none of the people crept out of doors to ask the meaning of a splendid cavalcade that arrived one morning. Here were the envoys of the Eastern Lombard League, one from every town, come to treat for the ransom of Count Richard of Verona, among the carrochs being that of Vicenza and that of Padua, drawn by snow-white oxen, and displaying its vermilion cross on a white field. Montelungo, the Papal Legate, who accompanied them, looked wistfully over the ditch to see whether the numerous steeples of Azzo of Este's time had not long since gone as stones to mend the ramparts. Taurello's people were slow in bringing any message, though, as the Guelfs reflected, they must know that the Pope was as good as there since his Legate was; and this delay made them pace the streets more soberly. At last a pursuivant came. "Taurello," he announced, "greets the League, returns courtesy for courtesy, and is doing his best to send off as soon as possible Tito, the Imperial prætor, who has been sent from Trent with Count Mainard on business of pressing importance. As soon as he leaves, the envoys of the League will be received." Hearing the prætor's name, the delegates looked significantly to one another, since his presence proved that the Emperor was taking to do with the case; then, going forward, they stole secret glances at the foreign-looking engines, now lying idle; while gangs of lean mercenaries ceased from their work to observe the cavalcade, as though expecting that some definite arrangement would grow out of its visit. "Taurello," said the envoys as they passed along, "might at least have spared negotiating with the Emperor's messenger, for he can scarcely dare to refuse terms from the League for Count Richard's release. We must get our friend away at once, with a lesson learned for the future; he will serve as a warning to fools and make them understand that, as long as there is breath in Salinguerra, it's not safe to come within reach of his claws. Who

told Count Richard to wound the beak of the tired-looking osprey, one of whose mere convulsive scratches tears an enemy to the bone?"

60-107. We hear scraps of their various conversations in the public square,

After the carrochs of the League were drawn up in the public square, and pennons of every colour were flaunting over them, the Guelfs began to talk more freely—all the more freely that the white, gaunt, crested ostrich with the horse-shoe in its mouth—the emblem of Romano—was not there.

"Ecelin," you might have heard one say, "was hardened up to his sin by his wife, and, now that she is gone, he sickens all alone, and the piece of devil's cruelty he calls his son is pining away in spite of all the horrible broths concocted for his cure—Hurrah!" "Hush!" rejoined his neighbour; "up at Oliero Ecelin will know every word that's spoken here. When we besieged Bassano under Azzo, who knew every stage of the business so well as Ecelin? Adelaide contrived that night by night a soldier-ghost stood at their bed-foot to report upon the progress of the siege: strong and fresh at the beginning, the vision became pale, though unwounded, and at last appeared with the filmed eyes of one in a faint, whereby they knew the place was taken."

"It is rather ominous for us," another was saying, "that the Ghibellins should get what cunning old Barbarossa tried in vain to wrest from our Azzo's father, Saint George having made the marshes round about it an impenetrable defence for his city."

"Young Ecelin," another was explaining, "is destined to be ruler of Padua rather than of Ferrara, as may be read from veins in his hand, which meet like the rivers Brenta and Bacchiglion."

89-107. With the tragedy of Cino's mother's head.

"By the mass!" another was crying out, "don't touch the planks over the fountains. Every tank is full of putrid human flesh. That's what Cino has just discovered to his cost. Thinking that Taurello, when driven out of the city, was a lost man, he would not

budge from Padua to help him; but back he sneaks now with Concorezzi, and they drag their carroch to San Vitale and plant the flag on the site of his own palace, which, in revenge, had been so adroitly razed by Taurello that the man didn't recognise the spot! Some Guelfs gaze at him and laugh among themselves: Cino not liking their looks, but determined to show he doesn't care for them, sits down on the tank's edge and begins to hum, 'Za, za, Cavalier Ecelin'; but they still look insultingly; therefore he must needs grow bolder, and strikes his feet deeper into the ground with every 'za,' till, caught up by one fierce kick, comes his own mother's head, its grey hair entangled in his spur!"

23. 'quitchgrass.' Couchgrass.

33. 'Montelungo.' Gregory of Montelungo, who was active in affairs mostly after Sordello's time? "He was one of the ablest agents ever employed by Rome, never shrinking from the post of danger. His stirring policy often put fresh spirit into the drooping Guelfs, though his conduct showed that he was not very scrupulous on the score of honour or humanity." He was a licentious creature. (Kington's *History of Frederick II.* Cp. Bk. VI., l. 730 note.)

43. 'Mainard.' The last of the Counts of Andechs, a Bavarian family who ruled over the Valley of the Inn and other land near it, died without issue. His wife's sister Adelaide, by whom he was succeeded, married Meinhard, Count of Görz, and their son, Meinhard II. (1257-95), "consolidated Tyrol within the limits by which it has ever since been bounded." (Art. "Tyrol" in *Encyc. Brit.*) According to chronology, Browning's reference should be to Meinhard I., if not to an earlier member of the family.

59. 'nare.' Lat. *naris*, 'a nostril'—plural *nares*, 'nostrils,' 'nose.'

60. 'carrochs.' See Bk. I., l. 317.

62. 'than.' Misprint for 'that.'

67. 'the devil's whelp.' Ecelin III.

73. 'Oliero.' Where Ecelin II. is monk.

80. 'swound.'

> "The ice was here, the ice was there,
> The ice was all around;
> It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
> Like noises in a swound."
>
> —Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner.*

82. 'cautelous.'

"Swear priests, and cowards, and men cautelous."
—*Julius Cæsar*, Act II. sc. i.

83. 'Azzo's sire.' Azzo V.

84. 'Vainly.' According to *The Story of Ferrara* (p. 15), the opposite was the case: ". . . the German troops emerged triumphantly from the morasses and stood at the gates. Resistance was useless; the city submitted at once, and did homage to Frederick."

'Saint George.' Whom the Ferrarese had chosen as their patron. (*The Story of Ferrara*, p. 7.)

88. 'Brenta and Bacchiglion.' Which meet at Padua.

95. 'Concorezzi.' Cp. l. 225.

## Ll. 107-181.

*We climb Taurello Salinguerra's wall, see his garden, avenue, terraces and statues, and stop at the door of his palace of San Pietro.*

107-113. We leave the city's horrors,

From such gruesome incidents we see that Taurello had hurriedly covered over his cruel deeds of vengeance to hide them from a stranger's gaze. We may as well avoid further revelations and leave the people at their work of discovery.

107-130. See Taurello's garden,

The autumn morning clears up quickly, and poor Ferrara looks not quite so ghastly. Let us scale this red-brick wall, which encloses a huge square space, and which on three sides is fortified within by trees of every sort and shape and size, each growing, no doubt, according to its nature, but stiff and cramped, like lions in a cage. On the inward side of the plantation shrubs have been inserted to fill the gaps between trunk and trunk and make a straight, smooth ledge. Getting over the row of solid tops, we alight on a wide and level space of grass, which is dotted here and there with foreign trees, with plenty of room to themselves; and in the centre of this space a laver, borne upon the heads of three uncomfortable-looking leopards, spreads itself out broad and shallow, with one bright squirt

130-151. And his avenue and its statues,

where the water bubbles in. Starting from an opening in the one treeless brick wall, there runs a wondrous avenue, paved high with gleaming stones, through the fissures of which leer African aloes, better fitted to bind the stones together than the iron clamps, which are already coming away with rust.

Above us are ranged statues—things of pride or of despair according to one's ideas of art. Wasps are swarming on them all, gods and goddesses, men and women—work roughly executed in crumbling Naples marble by some Greek sculptor, and meant to resemble the Messina marbles in which Constance took delight, or the font with caryatides which, conveyed by Taurello himself to Mantua for his liege lady Adelaide, was afterwards placed in the Goito vault. Only these garden-statues are not like the still stone maidens: they are figures in motion, able to take care of themselves, and stoop down with lowered arms to catch you when you pass. But they don't catch you, and from terrace to terrace you are led forward by their rows, in which, at intervals, you note some works of brighter and more majestic appearance—no doubt the choicest that Sicily could produce. Here, sullen during his short breathing-space, stands the Gladiator, gathered up for his last fight. Wiping the tell-tale blood out of his eyelids, scarce able to keep open under the iron-sheathed fingers with which he shades them, he collects his strength amid the buzz and rustle of the spectators in the dusky hideous amphitheatre, while they declare him more than a match for his adversary, that he may finish their day's diversion by dispatching the Gaul, who has made so good a fight. Here, again, a female slave, allowed, for her great love of him, to cling about her hero's knees, curls up a breathless heap of limbs while she watches dart after dart fly from his car as it cleaves the thickest of the fight.

151-171. And his terraces with their statues,

We reach the last terrace, and stand before Taurello's palace of San Pietro.

All the wonderful works we have described were Salinguerra's plan to rival the marvels of Sicily, that his girlish wife Retrude might feel at home in her new land; and neighbours, seeing it carried out, were much astonished at the novel princely style adopted by the rough and ready soldier. 171-177. Which were all for his girl-wife.

In San Pietro Count Richard Boniface is held a prisoner; to it the envoys of the League must come to sue for terms of release; and at its door, which he has approached by the labyrinth beneath, stands Sordello. 177-181. At this crisis his palace attracts several important folk.

120. 'to smooth one ledge.' The three rows of trees (l. 209) are of slightly different heights, so that they form an arboreal slope (or stair?) up to the top of the wall.

158. 'his last fight.' Of the set? It is not likely that it means that his victory will cost him his life. Compare, as the counterpart of this statue-scene, the Dying Gladiator in Byron's *Childe Harold*, Canto IV.

163. 'his over-match.' "This which I speak of hath been nowhere better seen than by comparing of England and France; whereof England, though far less in territory and population, hath been (nevertheless) an over-match." (Bacon's *Essays*, "The True Greatness of Kingdoms.")

174. 'Retrude.' See Bk. II., l. 910. History has never seen the gardens.

175. 'enlarged so much.' The subject is 'neighbours.'

## Ll. 181-330.

*Going back a little in the personal history of Sordello, Browning explains what prompted him to visit Taurello. Through the turmoil of the time the minstrel is led to perceive that the world's crowd, which at first, in his boyish dreams at Goito, he had believed to be composed of grand and happy beings worth imitating and eclipsing, and latterly had regarded as capable of being made to work out in actual life his own great conceptions, is really a mass of afflicted creatures, with but a tawdry rag of happiness clinging about them. This perception, however, does not destroy his recently adopted idea that the crowd is the body to his soul. With all*

*its misery, it is part of himself, and he regrets now that he did not long ago think of making it happy, since that would have meant happiness for himself.*

**181-240.** Why is Sordello there? He has learned that men are very different from the figures of his dream-days,

He had really left Verona with the intention of going to Azzo of Este's camp, which was pitched on the cornfields (a poor piece of land rescued from the morass surrounding Ferrara); and he had seen the march of the envoys of the League and the Papal Legate's cavalcade. They made a fine enough show, no doubt, but he did not see them in the light in which he had regarded men when, in his boyish dreams at Goito, he was eager to have nothing to do with them except as their adored superior. He had lately made up his mind to put to use every part of the crowd; and the more he pried into the state of human society the less satisfied did he become with his own position at the moment. Did he, then, abandon the idea of having any connection with them? Was there anything unexpected in the sight, hoped for in his dreams, of beings he once fancied enjoyed all kinds of delights in their common life? Even a short time ago he had still pictured mankind as a galaxy of brilliant creatures—the creatures whom he had rivalled in his youthful dreams, and whom, as he had tried to show men by means of his minstrelsy, he had at least wonderfully reproduced in his imagination, and on whom he had recently determined to impress his own mind: were these, about whom he had raved, the actual men he saw? He expected to find them all great, but, as he was learning now, he might as well have expected to find Taurello's triple line of trees one great pine: there were a few pines, but they stood among a throng of common shrubs, such as he had never admitted into his dreams, or had admitted only to be idealised into the other trees that flourished there. Of proper chiefs in the processions he had seen that morning how few there were! One or two men in them were no doubt notable, but what of the mass? The idea of the vast common

**217-240.** The few being great at the expense of the many.

people grew and grew upon Sordello; and he was further impressed by the thought that those who passed that day before his bodily eye, and the greater number left behind at home, and posterity, the greatest host of all, lived with their common human senses, and their fractions of joys and their enormous miseries, simply to make a chief or two a possibility in the world. Mainard and Concorezzi were no doubt grand and important, but did they not borrow their grandeur and exaltation from the fact that Mainard's Tyrolese and Concorezzi's Paduans were poor, obscure creatures? And the truth was all the more startling that the multitudes, serving as stairs by which a few could mount to greatness, never pondered seriously on what might be amiss, and would even, like Eglamor, smile amid their grief; for as a man once wealthy but now decayed uses for daily wear some grand robe meant for a special feast in the time of his prosperity, so ordinary mortals keep about them the remnant of their youth's dream, if not experience, of glorious joy: they make believe they are not so miserable as they really are.

240-290. He cannot but help the multitude, because it is his body, or other self.

While the crowds (composed of men who set but little store by life's joys—the things for which Sordello was now ardently longing—and would give them away for nothing, or who, if they did really enjoy anything, betrayed in every look and tone, and in their mirth as in their woe, an indefinable tragic something which made it easy for him to estimate their state as bad) grew and grew thus upon his imagination, the old memories of how he had yearned to be the power of powers among them returned, but with a new result: ere he could suspect that such a thing had happened, he and the crowds had become one, and this new body to his soul seemed impatient to be used by him, though in a manner utterly different from that in which he had aimed at using them when he dreamed of them as the worshippers of his own mind. Strange to say, Sordello, though after his retreat to Goito from Mantua he had

yearned for the smallest part of interest in real life, found mankind too far below him: they, his body or adjunct, were more in bondage through their want of genuine joy in actual experience than he, their soul or principal, was through his having no place in the world's activities. What was the use of two or three superior beings, whom he could impress himself upon and cause to act out his mind, if all the rest—the rest of his other self—was grovelling in the dust? No; he must first secure a mighty equilibrium of happiness for the mass and gain for all what had as yet been the privilege of only a few. And now he saw what a great mistake he had made at Mantua. There he should have thought first, not about the revelation of his own grand conceptions, but about men, and should have taken their own wants, which he now beheld clearly enough on all sides, as his want, and then, and not till then, should have concerned himself with the revelation, by means of men, of the rare qualities of his own soul. It followed naturally that, through no external claim upon him on their side, which would have made it virtue on his side to serve them, he now felt bound to serve and save them, because, as he believed, to serve and save them was to serve and save himself. Thus he was irrevocably committed to common humanity; and he could not cease wondering how, in his eagerness to rule men and impress his mind upon them, he had not long ago conceived the idea, now clear, that he must rule them so as to make them happy, and so, in turn, be made happy himself. So he sighed more deeply than ever over the fact that the vigour of his life was gone; for it was most improbable that he would ever have such a chance of bringing men beneath his sway as he had had when they honoured him as king of minstrels at Mantua. In the light of his latest idea about humanity, his physical weakness was to be doubly deplored. There was the Papal Legate—a comfortable, fleshy man, with his liquid blue eyes and large tongue and moist open mouth—a

**263-290. Which he should have discovered when minstrel at Mantua.**

man innocent of tear and wear in body or in mind—and he had served the people for years and years! And Sordello felt that he might never have a chance at all.

290-327. He believes Guelf and Ghibellin aim at the people's good, but seek it in different ways,

Fortunately he saw his error before it was altogether too late; and since his prime office, which was to win happiness for himself, included the secondary office, or the means by which it was to be won, which was to make the people happy, he had best accept both. Taurello, an adept in work for the people, could teach him how to help them toward the blissful state which long ago he fancied all men enjoyed in the course of things. He would ask the people's friends how he should go about his task; for there must be one way, and that must surely be to advocate the people's cause. And now he understood all Palma's story of contending parties. They were trying to do what he, with his enormous genius, would accomplish. What made the strife between parties but difference of opinion as to which was the better method for securing the people's happiness? That explained all the harsh and widespread conflict of Guelfs, commonly believed to be the hope of Lombardy, and Ghibellins, who were the despair of the Papacy—all this strife between Emperor and Pope, which was like a confused, shifting story of a garden of Eden. One party boldly rises in strength only to succumb to the other. The Emperor, as the Guelfs would put it, was the interloping devil in Lombardy, and the Pope its natural protecting deity; yet, however much mischief the Kaiser might do in the country, there was always a fascination in the idea of Imperial government. On the other hand, the Pope, as the Ghibellins would put it, was the serpent made by God's curse to love the ground, whose long heavy body breaks at noonday the tree of right government, and who needs the Kaiser to come as an avenging angel to dislodge him; yet there was always something attractively beautiful in the idea of Papal supremacy. The whole question of the contest, Sordello reflected, was

this: "Which of these two powers is best fitted to do men good? That, no doubt, is what I have to discover. Both are aiming at humanity's welfare, but which best knows the way to secure it?"

**327-330. And visits Taurello to have the Ghibellin way explained.**

Thereupon he saw Count Mainard of Tyrol, Tito's companion, come strutting out of San Pietro. He certainly had one way of helping men—by engines of war. This method might perhaps be improved upon: in any case Sordello would like to understand the idea at the root of it, and Taurello would be the very man to explain.

It was on this quest that Sordello entered the palace of San Pietro.

181. 'had really left.' Even then he must have had a lurking idea that the Guelf cause was better fitted to help the people. Sordello is honestly anxious to benefit them, but he has not yet been delivered from his egoism.

205. 'as he had hoped to be without.' When he retired in disappointment to Goito.

229. 'Seemed passive.' "But when redress is in our own power and resistance is rational, we suffer with the same humility from beings like ourselves, because we are taught from infancy that we were born in a state of inferiority to our oppressors, that they were sent into the world to scourge and we to be scourged. Accordingly we see the bulk of mankind, actuated by these fatal prejudices, even more ready to lay themselves under the feet of *the great* than the great are to trample upon them." (Wordsworth's *Prose Works*, "Letter to the Bishop of Landaff.")

322. 'Count Mainard.' See l. 43.

323. 'San Pietro.' Salinguerra fortified this district, in which stood an old castle.

326. 'Arbalist.' A crossbow. An arbalist of the heavier kind, made of strong material, required a mechanical apparatus to work it.

'manganel.' Or 'mangonel.' A huge engine for hurling stones. (See *Century Dictionary.*)

## Ll. 331-375.

*Stunned by Taurello Salinguerra's explanation of the Ghibellin policy, Sordello staggers back to the city of Ferrara, narrowly escapes murder, and is made to sing a song beside the Verona carroch's fire.*

331-342. Stricken by Taurello's words, Sordello returns to the city of Ferrara,

Scarcely had an hour passed when Sordello came forth, looking older by years than at his entry. His interview with Taurello Salinguerra had oppressed him, and he staggered away, like a beast with new wounds upon the old, into Ferrara. It was not empty as in the morning. The inhabitants, ordered by Salinguerra to huddle indoors with their dead, that the visitors might not come upon a city of universal horror and mourning, had now crawled forth, glad to converse with any living man. Evil-doers had their chance. A woman offered to sell either of her daughters to Sordello for half of the gold chain he wore about his neck, but an archer who knew his minstrel's coat bade him beware of a man who, looking very innocent while he played his fingers upon the sleeve in which his knife was concealed, was in league with the pair to murder him. Night setting in with cold autumn dews, they kindled great fires, while the priests began to say mass at every carroch, and he had to pass between lines of kneeling worshippers. Presently the carroch of Verona attracted his eye by its purple drapings. Silently he bent over its fire, when violent voices were raised beside him, one crying: "Don't describe the youth that struck me from the porch; I did not strike him back, for I too have chestnut hair, which is of the Ecelins, and my kindred and I serve them and hate Azzo. Here, minstrel, sing us a song, and drive bad thoughts away. Take my glove for your reward!" And for that man's sake he turned from the fire. "A song of Eglamor's!" was scarcely asked, when all, with a shout, demanded one by Sordello, the most famous minstrel of all. He would

342-348. Narrowly escapes murder,

349-372. Is made to sing a song,

have been happy to refuse—to plead ill-health, as he did once before, or to say that surely they had a better poet among them to whom they could dispense praise or blame —to say anything, in short, to escape or to share with some one else the intolerable risk he was running—but he had, as Naddo declared, the precious gift of gauging his audience: once he began, it was easy to sing, and to sing well. "I made that," he said to a youth who had risen as if to listen: it was Palma. She took him by the hand and silently led him through the company.

**372-375. And is led away by Palma.**

347. 'the pair.' Who make the pair?

356. 'Affirm not.' Why?

370. 'his intolerable risk.' He was a Ghibellin minstrel at a Guelf carroch.

373. 'I made that.' Was this to elicit some countersign from the disguised Palma? They had already met at San Pietro, but there she would be clothed in ordinary garments.

## Ll. 376-468.

*After the departure of his visitors from San Pietro, Taurello Salinguerra is left alone in the presence-chamber, where he sits meditating. His personal appearance is in strong contrast with that of Sordello.*

**376-398. The presence-chamber of San Pietro,**

Let us now return to Taurello Salinguerra in his palace of San Pietro. Tito of Trent, the Prætor, had given place to Palma and Sordello, who, in turn, had left when the Papal Legate, Montelungo, was announced. The representative of the Kaiser, the representative of the Pope, and Sordello, the incarnation of the people's hope, had said their say, and Taurello was left behind with no one but himself to talk with. The dreary, vast presence-chamber had been prepared in a rough and ready way for the day's receptions. The most prominent object was the Kaiser's ominous emblem—the grim, two-necked, and crowned eagle—which, with full face, had been coarsely done on the wall in black ochre;

while on each side of it were the green and yellow colours of the House of Romano. Then there was the new token brought by Tito from the Emperor, which tried the patience of the Papal Legate. (If Palma had only known what Taurello was almost proposing to himself when the sight of her restored to his lips the half-smile which three months of leadership in Monk Ecelin's place had banished!) Afterwards, however, the Legate found him the same as before, and never asked what badge he had wound and unwound so carelessly during their conversation.

398-409. Where Taurello sits alone,

The chief had been sitting silent since the departure of Palma and Sordello, whose brief interview with him opportunely arrested thoughts that had come unbidden but had not been ordered off; though, indeed, that was the time for accepting or decidedly rejecting an idea, his plan of action admitting of no delay. His wiles and tricks were exhausted now: it was by them he had put a fairly good face on what was for him a most costly victory. Ferrara was saved from destruction, but that was the best that could be said; and he could muster only a few sound troops, which were drawn up with the maimed soldiers carefully placed in the rear. All that was plain enough, but only now did he note that it meant he must either make terms acceptable to the Guelfs or in some way strengthen his own Ghibellin position.

409-423. Thinking about Sordello.

Of what, then, as he met with this strange luck of receiving from Tito the Imperial rescript and badge, rewarding his martial skill so well, was he thinking? Was he wondering how they would either tempt Monk Ecelin back to his old post, or put some colour of enthusiasm for the cause into young Ecelin's pale face, or, lastly, whether he would refrain from saying anything about them and quietly become the head of the Ghibellin interest himself? No; it was not, for a time at least, on such matters that he pondered. Sordello, he was reflecting, was the least, as he himself was the

greatest, of the servants of Romano. The contrast between them was stronger than he supposed. He did not know that the minstrel had spent his thirty years in doing nothing, the journey to Ferrara being their most notable event. Yet, with all his idleness, Sordello was lean, worn out, and to all intents and purposes really old—a stammering, awkward man that hardly dared to meet Taurello's commanding gaze. The chief, on the other hand, carried lightly his sixty years, during which he had dealt with Emperors and Popes, and had been involved in all manner of plots: you would have said it was a youth that looked out northward over the sickly trees, so agile, quick, and graceful was the head that turned on the broad chest, always clad in flexible steel, which dashed the sunlight off like a spray of fire. His helmet removed, one noted the handsome, thick brown locks, which were discoloured as if a crown encircled them, because the basnet, fraying his hair where it rested, had made a thin white line round his head through the glossy locks, which lay fold upon fold, massive as any statue's, on his brow. This circle was the mystic mark Adelaide had observed and tried to learn about from books. His face was square as a lion's, and his keen eyes were set in deep shade by the lines that ran to them from the bold nose and bearded cheek. They were never lighted with laughter, being untouched even by the half-smile that spoiled an otherwise perfect lip — a cold, firm lip which would never betray his thoughts.

**424-449. Taurello's personal appearance.**

Taurello Salinguerra was little given to meditation. A train of thought was seldom indulged in, as it was on this occasion, when a period of his life was fulfilled. His life was indeed made up of such periods, into each of which his whole soul was thrown; so that the story of one would serve as the story of any other. His activities rolled on like a stream till, as happened on this occasion, they were arrested by some crisis, which dammed them back with a necessary pause for reflection, only to send

**450-468. A train of thought was a rarity with him.**

them headlong on their course once more. And recollecting that no grave situation had ever proved too much for him, he smiled. Beyond stretched his garden grounds, by injuring which the Guelfs had afforded him the chance of laying a strong hand upon Ferrara, and had so gained him an opportunity which the Emperor, whose black eagle was ochred above on the wall, now invited him to improve effectually. Near the Imperial rescript lay a new Imperial badge, in the shape of a baldric; while conspicuous beside them was another article, but one that marred all enterprise, achievement, and reward —the missive from Ecelin the monk.

378. 'at Montelungo's visit.' This is inconsistent with l. 399.

392. 'if Palma knew.' That Taurello had trifled with the idea of himself accepting the badge and becoming, instead of Romano, head of the Ghibellin power.

416. 'Romano's last.' From what follows, it seems better not to take 'last' and 'first' as denoting time.

459. 'oblivion infinite.' Of set meditation and thought about himself as distinct from his work.

468. 'Ecelin's missive.' See Bk. III., ll. 528-534.

## Ll. 469-511.

*Taurello Salinguerra's thoughts pass from Sordello and swiftly traverse his own past. Belonging to Ferrara, he, in his youth, was to win the whole city through marriage with Linguetta, daughter of the deceased Marchesalla, the last of the Guelf family of the Adelardi; but his bride was stolen and given to Azzo, father of Azzo VI.*

What was the personal history along which Taurello Salinguerra's thoughts flew so quickly?

469-483. At Ferrara, young Taurello's betrothed, Linguetta,

Few names were as old as his at Mantua; but at Ferrara, where his ancestors had latterly enrolled it, the Adelardi spared no pains to rival those who bore it. The two families divided the city equally between them. Like its shield, they were black and white, or Ghibellin, as Taurello afterwards called himself, and Guelf, which

was the style adopted by Azzo of Este, who never thought of establishing himself there till Marchesalla, the last of the Adelardi, was dead. Taurello's party aimed at marrying him to Linguetta, this Marchesalla's daughter, and securing the whole power, but the other side laid counter-plots. The Guelfs of Ravenna suddenly arrived, assaulted the San Pietro quarter, and made off with his bride. Then, allowing time for the people's dismay to subside, Boniface, the father of our Count Richard, hurried down to Ferrara to allay the indignation into which it passed, and to complete the scheme. "Before you blame us Guelfs," he said, "understand from what disgrace we have rescued you: this Taurello, who, had he married Linguetta, would have become sole lord of your city, we reckon only a vassal of Azzo of Este. Azzo himself, to be sure, abhors what we did, but we were zealous for your welfare." This pleased the citizens, and forthwith a meeting of their elders was held. "Old Salinguerra is dead," they said, "and his heir is but a boy: what if we decoy hither the azure Lombard Eagle, for whom power waits in any part of Italy, fix him here, and so end our troubles in a trice? For the private wrong they did us by their robbery let the public good of the city compensate." Even Taurello's staunchest friends, telling him that the town would make him amends, joined in giving him a goshawk and assuring him one morning that he might have capital sport over the green grass a mile or two away. The youth sauntered along the plain, became restless, began to think, and got back to the city in time to see Azzo enter with Linguetta as his bride, while Boniface rode smirking by his side. "She brings him half Ferrara," the people whispered, "and all Ancona. If young Taurello only knew!"

**483-494.** Was stolen by the Guelfs,

**494-511.** And given, with the consent of the whole city, to Azzo VI.

470. 'names in Mantua.' See Bk. II., l. 917.

472. 'the Adelardi.' The last of the line was Guglielmo, surnamed della Marchesella, a man of great valour. His daughter, called Marchesella, was entrusted at an early age to her intended

husband, Salinguerra, but she was carried off from his palace to that of the Marquis of Este. According to Sismondi, she was given to Obizzo of that House, but, according to Muratori's authorities, to Azzo V. (Muratori's *Annali d'Italia*, anno 1196; Sismondi's *Hist. des Rép. Ital.*, ch. xii.)

477. 'As after.' There is much discussion of the question when these party-names came into use. For their origin, see Kington's *History of Frederick II.* See also Cary's note on *Paradise*, Canto VI., l. 107.

511. 'If the stripling knew!' Hardly 'what she brings as her dowry'; possibly 'what is going on now.'

## Ll. 512-625.

*Taurello Salinguerra's autobiographical thoughts at San Pietro are continued.*

*Befriended by Henry VI., he began to aim at recovering his former position at Ferrara, and to this end Ecelin II. and he plotted together at Vicenza. They were driven out of that city, however, by the Guelfs, and, during their retreat, he lost, as he believed, his wife and his only child. From that date his whole service was devoted to the House of Romano. His character is further depicted.*

**512-539. After visiting Sicily, Taurello, a powerful youth, aimed at returning to Ferrara.**

Soon afterwards young Taurello Salinguerra was in Sicily, where Henry VI. ruled in right of his wife Constance. The two men understood each other; and so it came about that one spring, when Azzo had nearly forgotten how he had crept into his downy seat at Ferrara, Count Richard hurried thither in hot excitement and implored him for the love of God to come out of Taurello's palaces; because, if he did not, there might be an irretrievable catastrophe, for the young warrior, with a beard's first growth, and sword on thigh, had just arrived at Mantua with tokens for Celano, Ecelin, Pistore, and other powers. What do we hear next? None of Ferrara's palaces was suitable for Taurello's young wife, who was of the Imperial family, and a band of foreigners came and wrought busily at gardens and buildings.

Worst of all was the news that, a child being born to him, he was only waiting till the line of trees between San Pietro and Tomà was finished to come to Ferrara; for, when Ecelin II., Podestà at Vicenza, called him thither, what else could they be planning than the youth's restoration, with the Kaiser's help, to the headship of the Ghibellins in the place of his former importance? Hearing this, Azzo, who had most to dread from the young soldier's vengeance, joined with Boniface, and taking time by the forelock, drove Ecelin and Taurello out of Vicenza. The Guelfs, however, yelled in triumph too soon. I have told how Ecelin, while being driven out, fired the city, and how through that piece of folly Taurello lost wife and child; but I did not tell how he bore the blow, stuck to the fight while retreating, got his other friends safe away, and dealt his enemies a good parting stroke. At first he seemed hardly to care about his loss, but men began to hear less of the certainty of the rise to greatness of Taurello Salinguerra's House. Through this change in him, however, Azzo gained nothing, because he simply had Taurello instead of Ecelin to plague him. The young warrior was infinitely superior to Ecelin, but, after the Vicenza disaster, he was content to take the second place and to change his energetic, ambitious nature so far as to live for the House of Romano, and, for its sake, to lose his individual life. He was grafted into it and nourished its growth, as a dwarf palm is prevented from bearing its own proper wine and oil through being wantonly grafted into the vine, which slily sucks out its life, till one vine-palm spreads out in grand leafage, though with poor result in fruit. Once weak Ecelin's mate, Adelaide, was set agoing,—she was urged to emulate, on the Ghibellin side, the valiant women of the Church, to rival her namesake, Adelaide of Susa, and to win the reward of the great Matilda of Tuscany,—Romano soon overbore the rest of Lombardy, not, as before, by sheer insolent force, but by an improvement, in accordance with the

**539-555.** Believing he had lost wife and child at Vicenza,

**555-590.** He gave himself wholly to the service of Romano.

times, on the Pope's methods of conflict. "Only why," asked Henry, whose understanding was none of the quickest, "does Taurello keep himself in the shade behind Romano, when we ordered him to stand forward and enjoy a prominence like our own?" Philip also, disappointed at the arrangement, reasoned with Taurello, and plied him with offers of another bride, and with a grander function, but all in vain: it was clear, they were forced to conclude, that through some unexplained weakness Taurello must remain obscure. Otho, too, free from prejudice for one or for the other, decided that Ecelin, unready, harsh, and unwilling though he might be, was a better man than his versatile, brilliant soldier, and he wondered how his predecessors always harped on the latter. To be sure, Otho had penetration! "Thus," quoth he, "are men deceived by a showy exterior."

590-625. Taurello, taking the world as he found it, could manage things and men,

Meanwhile Taurello Salinguerra, engaged in many lands, went carelessly through his life, with its alternations of peace and strife. It was hard to take him by surprise. He was always prepared for the need of the time. As in many other points, he put Sordello to shame in this, that, unconcerned whether his qualities were the expression of something that had always lain within him or had been got by downright learning, and with no ideals of graces, he took his chances as they came, and did each thing for its own sake. Your Greek is a slippery fellow, ready to take advantage of the least flaw in a contract; therefore Taurello learned Greek. Arabic is the language of astrology, which is worth knowing, therefore he took the additional trouble of learning it also. That lore once mastered, he could counteract the efforts of any one who might try to make the Tuscan Adelaide believe that her horoscope did not bind her fast to the interest of Frederick. Over the Emperor himself, indeed, he exercised an extraordinary influence. He makes him put off the crusade; undertakes that next year he will leave John de Brienne in

604-611. The Emperor Frederick not excepted.

the lurch; will make him come to Bassano to see St Francis' Church, and Guido the Bolognian's picture—a picture of angels, with aureoles like quoits that have alighted neatly on their heads, who are celebrating Ecelin's exploits—which Taurello declares equals anything in Greek painting! In the way of elegance, he played the angelot and sang to its accompaniment; while, as for prowess, did he not at the last siege cleave Tito down through the middle of his trunk? These details are mentioned that you may see how Taurello Salinguerra, looking out for men, to read their characters and make use of their capabilities, revealed himself so far as he set them working; while Sordello cared nothing for what men could do themselves, but regarded them as valuable or as useless only as they were qualified to admire him. This soldier cared nothing about men's opinion of him. Managed without being allowed to become aware of the fact, they thought that, on the whole, he was a shallow man.

513. 'When Heinrich ruled.' See Bk. I., l. 980.

534. 'Tomà.' See Bk. v., l. 283.

535. 'Mantua.' A mistake for 'Ferrara.'

546. 'I told.' See Bk. II., l. 320. This is below the belt! Taurello did not lose his child at Vicenza. An author has no right to put his imprimatur on a popular error that helps to form his plot. If that were allowed, a novelist would have little difficulty in weaving a tale of bewildering mystery.

569. 'her namesake.' See Bk. III., l. 488.

570. 'Matilda.' See Bk. III., l. 492.

579. 'Philip.' Philip of Suabia, eldest brother of Henry VI., and Otho IV. of Aquitaine, son of Henry the Lion, were rival emperors after the death of Henry VI., the claims of his child Frederick being overlooked for a time.

582. 'a statelier function.' A grander position?

589. '"thus," quoth he.' Varnishing his mistake with philosophy.

603. 'Jove trined.' Is 'Jove' subject and 'trined' its verb, or is the phrase a 'nominative absolute,' 'Jove' meaning Taurello, and 'trined' being the perfect participle?

612. 'the angelot.' See Bk. II., l. 518.

614. 'Tiso.' Tisolino di San Piero (Sampier) was involved in

the strife when Taurello suddenly returned to Ferrara, but after escaping from the city he killed himself rather than surrender to some peasants, and Salinguerra gave him honourable burial. (*The Story of Verona*, p. 25.) Cp. Bk. III., l. 302, and Bk. v., l. 298.

### Ll. 625-695.

*Taurello Salinguerra's autobiographical thoughts at San Pietro are continued.*

*When, as the Ghibellin power was gaining irresistibly in Lombardy, Ecelin II. changed in a remarkable degree, and at last became a monk, Taurello took the foremost place and completed the defeat of the House of Este.*

625-640. When the Ghibellin power was gaining steadily,

With Taurello and Adelaide at work, the Ghibellin cause made rapid headway in Lombardy. Their enemies gradually yielded, and town after town saw the folly of continuing the struggle. "We need not resist the inevitable," said even those with Guelf sympathies. "It is all very fine to talk of subjecting everything to the divine authority of the Pope, but the thing cannot be done. This contumacy of Taurello will wear out Este and the Lombard League. The Ghibellins are gaining upon us." This proved true. Old Azzo and old Boniface, entrapped near Ponte Alto, died within a month of each other, and lay buried at Verona. Each left a pair of sons, but, three years later, Azzo lost his heir Aldobrand, and Boniface lost his heir Guglielm, the other two sons, Azzo and Richard, remaining as the entire stay of their respective houses, Este and Boniface.

640-658. Ecelin grew strange

But, when the chances of the Ghibellins were thus made better than ever, Ecelin II. grew old, or his brain altered—perhaps it was incapable of taking in the new ideas required by new situations. He would rock himself like a drunken man, would chuckle at the very completeness of his woe, or would weep real tears. Suddenly, in spite of his remorse at previous victories, he would make a mad onslaught upon Este; then soon he would cringe for peace—peace at the sacrifice of former

gains and of the growth of his own House—so that, as one might expect, Este rose again, while Romano sank. It being observed that Ecelin indulged in his mad freaks only when Taurello was away, every friend besought him to be advised by his soldier. But he would have no such thing. "He had sons," he retorted, "to advise him—indeed he was quite capable of making his own plots." It was Adelaide that kept him from being destroyed root and branch; and, when she died, his case was hopeless. Gaily he made alliances, gave away lands to any who would take them, and withdrew from the world. Taurello, finding his patience abused when, being summoned to the convent, he was refused a word at its door, promptly threw off both his imbecile superior's yoke and his own frank, foolish smile, and took the chief place in the management of the Ghibellin cause. A few successful exploits soon made men speak of him again as one destined for prominence. His position, too, made him fight, and that was what fitted him best. So, as in the flush of a second youth, he dealt his blows with a right good-will. Este, in truth, was in a short time utterly overcome; and men began to recollect an old outrageous hatred Taurello bore toward that House. They remembered how it would break out suddenly, like an earthquake in sunny weather; as it did, for example, on that famous day when, with his hundred friends, he tried to slay Azzo before the Emperor's face, and how, when Azzo calmly refused to fight a liegeman, Taurello immediately became calm again himself. It was the downfall of the House of Este, rather than the destruction of an Azzo, that he sought; therefore he compelled himself to avoid inexcusable violence and keep himself in the right. Thus Este's true antagonist rose out of Ecelin in the shape of this soldier, and the attention of all men was again directed toward him.

**658-663.** And became a monk.

**663-695.** Whereupon Taurello struck harder than ever at the House of Este.

This man it was who, in his palace of San Pietro, leaned absent-mindedly in the window-recess, where he amused himself by trying to draw Frederick's face in

the dust with his sheathed forefinger. As his eye rested on the waving withering trees, his smile deepened and his thoughts of the past came out in monologue.

664. 'then refused.' But compare Bk. II., l. 899.

675. 'stifled hate.' Because of the theft of Marchesella (Linguetta).

681. 'calm refusal.' See Bk. I., l. 818. When on the same occasion Salinguerra preferred a similar charge against Azzo, he replied that he had plenty of men nobler than Salinguerra to fight with if he felt inclined.

689. 'whist.'

"The wild waves whist."

—*The Tempest*, Act I. sc. ii.

## Ll. 696-848.

*Still at San Pietro, Taurello Salinguerra soliloquises on the events of the memorable night on which Ecelin II. and he were driven out of Vicenza, when, as he believed, his wife and child were lost. His old comrade having turned monk, shall it be another member of the House of Romano that he will invest with the Imperial symbol —or himself? The latter idea evaporates in ashamed amusement.*

696-718. Taurello soliloquises. Ecelin then and Ecelin now.

"So you are fairly housed in your cloister at last, my old comrade! That we should stick together the whole year I kept Vicenza! How old Boniface and old Azzo caught us in the market-place, when, Ecelin at that pillar, I at this, each of us was in mid-swing of a more than furious speech, in which he was egging on the rabble to abjure allegiance to their Marquis! Bacchus, how they boasted when they got us! Ecelin was to be their drudge, and I was to be released on a promise to pay up all arrears of tribute—Bacchus! At that time my Ecelin could stoutly promise anything. What bone and muscle the man had! Sound of wind and limb, he spoke out the excuse I made up for him; and now he sits slavering and dumb, chafing each foot, benumbed by the cold altar-slab! Will no vein throb when some

monk, out of spite, shall blab to his tonsured fellows that Frederick is reported to be on this side of the Alps?—eh, brother whatever they call you, sworn to abjure the world, with all its vexations, and to be God's own now? Shut out old memories if you can! The midnight whisper becomes a shout, the walls about you grow into a human crowd, and the past, with the world you hate, is with you! You are lying in ambush; you are in the open field; we are firing Vicenza—see the surging flames—hurrah! Follow me! Bring up the Mantuans! Safe through the San Biagio gate! No, not yet! The mad people waken! They are trying to intercept us! What if they block the gateway? None of us can get through! Back out of the way, you Bassanese! Use the sword's edge, my men—shear, thrust, hew down the living wedge, knock out their upturned black eyes! Hell—is there fire in them, that they make your brass gloves hiss as you tear them out! Bravely done! Slidder through the reeking gateway! We are clear! And then the sudden cry: 'How now? Where is Adelaide? You six had charge of her!' Next comes your vow, and you foam at the mouth, and tear your hair, till, with one great shriek, you fling your basnet with the gold flower to a man who hauls naked across the fire the Adelaide he that morning had scarce dared to look upon unveiled. And how you crown the archer who lays your infant smiling at your feet and dies. While mine—— Bacchus! There must be more than one charred corpse there.

718-748. What visions, in the dead of night, will steal upon his monkish brain?

727-736. Gate San Biagio reeks with blood.

736-744. Adelaide and child Ecelin are rescued.

745-748. Taurello's wife and child.

"Well, it was my fate. And now, though Adelaide is dead, I live on, and, instead of that Azzo, to-day's Azzo is here for me to fight: by whatever means, we pull the House of Este into a heap. That business, often foiled when touching success, will come off at last. True, it was at such a juncture that Henry died, and that Otho doffed his crown; still, if Frederick holds to his purpose of coming to Lombardy, and if this baldric is laid on the neck of—this same Ecelin, I suppose, that

748-777. Ecelin is worse than useless, but who else can get the baldric?

must needs recoil when our best days are beginning. Recoil! That would be nothing. If he would only let me use his name and leave me free to plan and fight! But he must interfere, forsooth, coming forth from his cloister to be my stumbling-block as before. Ay, and there's the old problem again: we must hold by a certain Head in the land. Who can explain this reverence for a name? Think of these Ecelins. Take them as men of originating force—why, six out of any twelve common soldiers digging in the trenches would excel them. But Ecelin is a fine, clear-sounding name; though, to be sure, it would be much simpler for men to cling to me and be done with it, for our friend Ecelin's abilities were—well, not much to boast of. I had to do all the work. I had to divide myself into fifty parts, like an overtasked elf that is compelled to shine at fifty different points at once. But now, though they have been sorely frittered, my forces gather themselves together and crown——

"But, Bacchus! is it so certain that Ecelin must be crowned?

778-805. What should prevent his wearing it himself?

"That aloe would climb if it dared, but to climb is not its nature; neither is it mine. It was just such a sprawling thing I looked upon, with just such a thought, at Messina's castle-court when Henry jestingly asked me if I would pledge my faith to win him back his right in Lombardy. 'Get marauders out of it, and you will rule there in my stead,' he said, laying the silk glove of Constance upon my head. I can see her now, robed all in miniver, Retrude following!

"I am absolved from toil for any master in Lombardy. The Ghibellin power devolves on me: that is what Tito said. For once I can freely form my own plan, with none to direct and none to whom account must be rendered. It is with the Emperor himself I have to do. He understands what a post I kept when toiling behind Romano. He knows who did true service, and who was able or was useless, and whether Ecelin or I deserve reward. And now, having rewarded me, he will soon

ask my advice; and I will point out that, if he would really vie with the Pope, Azzo and Boniface make a strong arm which the Hohenstauffen race must break, and will show him in words how, that arm being already out of joint, it were easy to twist the bone out of the socket. What then? My friend Azzo will stare when I, who used to be the plague of his House, take to playing the counsellor. I shall fret myself abundantly —for what? To wear a useless badge—to occupy a post devoid of action. No! I have twenty years to live, and how can I spend them better than in my old trade of fighting? To be sure, I could, if it were necessary, do something in the way of statecraft. If there were one who sought to overthrow my power by intrigue — say a son in league with Azzo to raid my palace and poison me—I might, having an object I care for, engage in diplomacy; but not otherwise. Besides, a life of fighting is ordained for me. The world's tide of struggle rolls and tosses, and why should I hope that I, a single wave, shall be lifted aside from the turmoil and laid to rest upon the shore? Without a doubt my day must be lived out in the storm of our time. For fifty years Lombardy has held me. Troubles have been raised and troubles have been quelled, but in the midst of them all has been Taurello; yet, a year or two after I leave this quaint palace and these garden-trees, my name is unknown. Ah! how can a man obtain a memory in the world? How can one make his fellows continue to talk of him, as this poor minstrel Sordello does, who, in spite of the bustle of our age, is so devoted to his songs?

**805-822.** It is his fate to be a fighting-man,

**823-840.** And he cannot change his element.

"Yes! poets and old native families may be destined to live on. There are flowers one may tear and trample upon, which yet never become extinct. That patch there, green as ever, covers the spot where I planted Retrude's Moorish lentisk beside the stair, that it might make a grander show than the aloes; and we trod down these green flowers—whatever you call them—into the sod. A world of trouble we took to shelter the stately foreign

plant and make it thrive, but all in vain. It would pine away, and now it is gone; while these green things would not be destroyed and are always in the way. The headship would be a foreign soil for me. Twenty years longer I will be the big soldier to frighten children with—though there again the House of Romano threatens to thwart me, for young Ecelin promises to turn out a proper tiger, as they are finding to their cost at Vicenza. Well, it's your fate, my fine Taurello! You just publish the Emperor's decree, and let the badge go to the youngster—though certainly it's much too good a prize for him.

840-848. Besides, he has ever propped up Ecelin.

"How now? What's this I have been dreaming about? Was I actually thinking of competing with my old comrade Ecelin, or of shuffling his children from their seat? Paltry dealing that would be! Why, I think I know Ecelin now—yes, and have known him for years. He was always a weakling: did I not take that into account and make it my business to prop him up? Here's Taurello hankering after a boy's plaything of a badge! Bacchus!"

And he laughed.

702. 'egging.'

> "Adam and Eue he egged to ille."
>
> —*Piers Plowman*, Passus I.

703. 'their Marquis.' Azzo.

737. 'the vow.' To turn monk.

746. 'More than one corpse.' The 'one' is his child's; there must be his wife's there too.

749. 'this Azzo.' The Sixth.

753. 'Heinrich died.' Henry VI., Frederick's II.'s father. He died in 1197.

'Otho . . . doffed.' Driven from Cologne in 1206 by his rival Philip, Otho IV. went to England to gain support.

760. 'must interfere.' By sending orders to give up the strife.

772. 'to share myself.' Like Ariel.

> "I flamed amazement: sometime I'd divide,
> And burn in many places; on the top-mast,
> The yards, and bowsprit, would I flame distinctly,
> Then meet, and join."
>
> —*The Tempest*, Act I. sc. ii.

787. 'miniver.' Variegated fur.

793. 'I mount To Friedrich.' This may mean simply that he begins to think about the Emperor, not about his subordinate, Tito.

809. 'my pines.' Cp. l. 211.

813. 'though.' Misprint for 'through.'

825. 'lentisk.' The tree which exudes the resin called mastic. It grows chiefly in the coast regions of the Mediterranean.

## Ll. 848-885.

*From his fancies of himself as head of the Ghibellin cause, Taurello Salinguerra returns to the immediate practical question of Count Richard Boniface's release.*

**848-863.** Taurello returns from fancies to the practical question of his prisoner, Count Richard;

Schemes in which cold-blooded men, like Taurello, engage, prosper when those of your enthusiastic sort, like Sordello, fail; the reason being that, while the latter, with great ideals and small opportunity, are always hesitating, the former, seeing nothing else to do if they stop, apply themselves heartily to the business that offers.

With Taurello, imagining things was only a caprice in the ordinary course of his life, which was one of deeds; so, having had enough of these fancies of seeing Lombardy, with Este and Boniface, completely under him as the Emperor's representative, he turned to the immediate practical question whether he could pacify the League without releasing Count Richard. To this came the interval of meditation in the presence-chamber of San Pietro! So, I might say by way of illustration,

**864-885.** As an Ethiop, soon leaving dreams of perfect revenge, plans a raid upon his enemies.

some Ethiopian, escaping from enemies who had enslaved him, dips a foot torn and bleeding from the torture of its shackle into the black, sluggish watercourse which guides him back to his own tribe's ground, where he is king. He laughs, because he has reached its boundary, as he guesses (while stripping off its skin to lay on injured nostril, lip, and eyeball) from the deeper yellow of the poison-wattles on the pouch of the first lizard he

wrests from its couch beneath the slime. Free at last to breathe, he meditates on enchantments of the South, which are of sovereign power to plague his enemies in mouth, eyes, hair, and nails; but, these enchantments being practised for a little within his imagination, he puts them soberly aside for something feasible, plans a raid with friends to give his foes as good as he got, is comforted by the thought of it, and strides off, hugging revenge in his heart, to the Mountains of the Moon.

857. 'fairly earned.' A little holiday of self-reflection amid his hard toil.

870. 'wattles.' 'Fleshy excrescences.'

## Ll. 886-1031.

*Once more we are translated from San Pietro palace at Ferrara to the city itself.*

*Sordello, taught by Palma from midnight to the break of day about Guelfs and Ghibellins, denounces both parties as enemies of mankind, and begins to hope that the discovery of the people's true cause has been reserved for him.*

886-926. Beside a dying carroch-fire at Ferrara, Sordello asks Palma how the Ghibellins try to help the people,

It was midnight. In the feeble moonlight the watcher, growing less alert, nodded on his spear, and the harassed city, its lanes looking narrower and its temples less exalted, seemed as though it were drawing itself together to keep in what little life was left. The rows of carroch-fires were smouldering away, and beside the blackest Sordello and Palma conversed in secret. "The Ghibellin," said he, "is your cause. What makes a Ghibellin? There must be certain laws at work (forgive my asking such a question so late in the day: you know how my youth was spent in idle ignorance, and I trust to you to tell me what my own life should have taught) which will explain what scared me in Taurello Salinguerra's conversation at the palace. Only

assure me that, underneath all that is being done in the Ghibellin name, there is a real concern for the final good of the people, who are mine. Show me how the horrid deeds he spoke of are done in their interest, and so remove the terrible impression made upon me by what he said. Why did he adopt such a heartless tone in giving his news to Tito? This morning I counted myself a recreant to the human race, because it has never received from me the slightest help. Why, I was asking then, should I boast of the force of my soul when it has expended itself on no object? Why should I divorce mankind from my interest, then admire the flights of my genius as though they were raising up into living space some half-quenched orb, which, unaided by me, would go out in darkness? If men are cast away into misery and disgrace, why should I boast of the brilliant performances of my soul, which I vaunt as all the more wonderful that they are not encumbered by the conditions of real life? But I, with my fruitless idealism, confront Taurello, who, happier in using his powers in the world, is doing for the people all that I should have done. And here comes my difficulty. The fact that their good is paramount with him accounts perhaps for his never having risen to the position for which he seemed fashioned—he has sacrificed his prospects to their cause,—yet he burns five hostages, and talks of that to Tito as if it were a matter of no consequence. He made an excuse, to be sure, when he saw us approach, but that, I believe, was to blind us to his indifference."

**926-932. And discovers that their aims are utterly selfish.**

Palma replied; whereupon Sordello, answering, continued: "More plainly than I expressed it, you have stated what I feared. Everything you do is for your own gain. There is not a word about the people—of making conquests for them, or even of relieving them and benefiting yourselves at the same time. Azzo and the other Guelfs have a cause also: do they prosecute it by the same heartless methods or by better?"

932-952. The Guelfs being proved no better, Sordello wonders if he may learn the secret of the people's good.

As Palma finished her account of the Guelfs, from which it appeared they were as heartless and selfish as the Ghibellins, morn broke. "Once more," said Sordello then to himself, "meet proudly the light of day. The people's charge of taking no share in the work of either of these parties fails, since both stand condemned for utter selfishness. These self-seekers are the busy ones: it is kinder to be silent, as thou art. Two parties take the world up, and allow no room for other workers, but, opposed though they be, they are at one in their injustice to the common crowd, and whoever joins the one or the other enlists in the ranks of man's inveterate foes. There is no need that I should decide between the two; for they are wholly bad and may be cursed. I have done nothing; they have done worse than nothing. Nay, I am better than I call myself; for to me, left out of account by the world, bereft of all knowledge of the movements of the times, and living out a dream amid trees and flowers, was left at least the notion of a service. Ha! May I not go farther? What but that notion brought me to inquire of Taurello — though I find it has never crossed his mind? What if there be what I have thought of—a real service of man — a cause distinct from the Guelf or the Ghibellin,—and what if it be reserved for me to discover it?"

952-1000. He hears the tale of Crescentius,

Soon thereafter a watcher pressed before Palma and Sordello to suggest a subject for their minstrelsy. They must know, he said, the tale of the worthy who long ago was Consul of Rome—"long ago with respect to ourselves, who are doing our fighting here now, but too late to bring about the good time he aimed at." Did they really not know about that Crescentius Nomentanus? And, in answer to Sordello's 'No,' the man told how, when their Superior introduced a novice to the brotherhood ("for I was just a brown-sleeve brother, appointed, too, in an off-hand, merry way, till Innocent bade me, much against my will, renounce my wife or

my monkhood"), one of the company always spoke before nocturns about Crescentius, this custom being observed that the edict which, after his death, consigned him to oblivion—though it could not cancel the power that hung about his vague name, powerful to stir up men at any moment to aims like his—might be counteracted, and his memory preserved. Within his brain at least the dead forgotten Rome of the Republic lived anew, though fortune had given the actual power of the day to Pope John and King Otho, neither of whom was worth a slave of Rome's. Happening to appear one day arrayed in white, and being consequently called Roman Consul for a jest, he took up the title in earnest, and at once began to follow close in the footsteps of Brutus. Standing fearlessly before the people, he bade them make Rome what it once had been, even the Rome of Brutus, of which kings had called themselves the mere citizens, and by which they were so captivated that, beguiled into great thoughts by such a form of government, they would give the best jewel in their crown in exchange for the senate's cypher. He flashes forth like a beacon on the night, all men catching something of his light, and the model Rome is just accomplished, when back comes Otho with John, the pope whom the Consul would have none of, and Hugo, Lord of Este, to win back their lordly privileges. Crescentius bent under the storm. "They crucified their Consul in the forum," continued the watcher, "and we became again such slaves at Rome that they could take away from me both my wife and my convent-place. Give us a song of Rome!"

**1000-1031. Which makes him resolve to erect an ideal government.**

This tale immediately began to work upon Sordello's mind. The mother-city, which he had pictured fantastically enough during his Mantuan days, seemed now to him the model after which all cities might be fashioned, the one question being how they might most nearly approach what lay beyond rivalry. Even the Guelf and the Ghibellin party professed to seek the

best government, though they really sought only their own aggrandisement.

Rome, then, Sordello felt, as he pictured it in colours not seen in its actual history, is the true cause of the people. Let Rome be our model—the Rome of Justinian's Laws, fitted for all the world—the Rome of the old Capitol and the later Castle Angelo—the Rome that for so long had a great past behind a great present, —where that great past keeps men sane, the upstart churches preserved from conceit by the grand forlorn Theatre, from which they seem to have issued as a world from its shell. For Sordello Rome typifies the scheme by which men will once more be put in possession of their rights. "On me," he cries, "and on me alone, it rests to build up the model government: for this great work have I endured all the sorrow of my ineffective past."

Thus, in the grey of the morning, he sprang forth to execute his plan in accordance with the needs of the people as he beheld them for himself.

887. 'since.' The interpretation in the text seems the only one possible.

906. 'our conference.' See l. 377. Palma and Sordello seem not to have entered the palace together (l. 180).

919. 'all I should have done.' See Bk. v., l. 305, and Bk. vi., ll. 194-210 and l. 839. From the time he entered the life of Mantua, Sordello's genius should have been devoted to the help of the people (l. 902 *et passim*). He will afterwards see that he should have aided them through supporting the Guelf cause. This, indeed, is the essential point in the interpretation of the poem. Dean Church missed it in his valuable study of *Sordello* (*Dante and Other Essays*), in which he says: "But what Mr Browning's telling does not make plain is, wherein was the failure." The failure was not at the end of Sordello's life, the point at which Dean Church forces it in, but belonged to his career from the time he beheld 'the veritable business of mankind.' The end itself was triumph, but his craving for self-revelation had kept him blind to the object he should have loved and served—the people's cause, which at that stage of history could be best served by the Guelf cause—devotion to which would have made his life and joy.

It must be borne in mind that, as far as Sordello's history is concerned, the poem from Bk. II., l. 260, deals with little more than the two last days of his life. See Bk. v., l. 1.

926. 'She spoke.' Something in answer to Sordello.

933. 'were proved alike.' Sordello comes to see later that the Guelf cause is the one by which his age can be helped. See l. 919.

960. 'Crescentius Nomentanus.' Crescentius explained to the Romans that the claim of the Popes to obedience rested on sanctity of character, of which they were eminently destitute. Persuading them to restore the Republic, he governed as Consul from 980 to 998. On the death of John XV. (977), who had been banished, but allowed to return on acknowledging the authority of the people, Otho III. appointed a German called Bruno to the Papal chair under the title of Gregory V. Crescentius, however, appointed John XVI., who was a Greek named Philagathus. The Emperor, returning to Rome with troops, put him to death with fearful tortures, and executed Crescentius, whom he had lured from his stronghold by pledging the royal word for his safety. Neander, Hallam, and other historians, do not unite with Sismondi in admiration of the Consul's character (*Hist. des Rep. Ital.*, ch. iii.) It will be noticed that Browning has put Pope John on the wrong side (l. 991).

986. 'would choose the gem.' A better interpretation may be found. Is there any historical reference here? One of the Ptolemies was a great admirer of Rome.

989. 'phanal.' Fanal (Greek *φαίνειν*).

992. 'Hugo.' Hugo of Provence, undisputed King of Italy except at Rome. But he died in 953 (see Art. "Rome" in *Encyc. Brit.*)

994. '"They crucified."' Different accounts are given of the manner of the Consul's death.

1001. 'at Goito.' Was this, then, an old dream come again? Along with the following line, it no doubt refers to his vision of men as grand and happy creatures, which attended him at the old castle and at the beginning of his Mantuan days.

1010. 'Guelf Rome or Ghibellin Rome.' The interpretation here is not satisfying.

1021. 'as a mundane shell.' The Coliseum, rather than the Theatre of Marcellus, seems to be meant. "The Coliseum," says Lanciani (*Pagan and Christian Rome*, ch. iii.), "was bristling with churches. There was one at the foot of the Colossus of the Sun. . . . There were four dedicated to the Saviour, a sixth to S. James, a seventh to S. Agatha, besides other chapels and oratories within the amphitheatre itself."

# BOOK THE FIFTH.

## Ll. 1-21.

*A day's observation of the people in Ferrara suffices to show Sordello the impossibility of forming the ideal State out of the human material at his command.*

1-21. Another fair dream fades: the ideal State cannot be built from the human material at hand.

CAN it be the same Sordello we see in the dusk as we beheld at dawn? Now he is a perished husk: then he rose up as a power fit to frame the ideal State. Is his great conception gone so soon? Yes, Sordello! watch this latest dream of thine fade away like those of thine earlier years. Hast thou found to-day in Ferrara shining creatures meet for thy Shining City? Sooth to say, these people in Ferrara have their own peculiar little ways. They have strange notions of the conduct required of model citizens. One is drunk and slips on the smooth causey, and his moon-shaped sandal, suddenly thrust out, trips up his blinking boon-companion. Their manners are none of the best. They wish to fight within their homes, and, regardless of couches, squat anywhere, while things they should regard as sacred are put to the basest use. Oh, huddle up all the horrors thou hast seen in this day's study of actual human life! Begone, ye who are unworthy of being banded together in one grand community, and drop to pieces, Rome, arch by arch!

1. 'in the dusk.' The chronology of Sordello's last days seems to be this:—

1. At Verona, in the palace, he is with Palma up to midnight at least.

2. Next day he goes with her to Ferrara, pays his first visit to Taurello Salinguerra, and in the evening has his vision of Rome.

3. Next day he sees Rome fade away, pays his second visit to Taurello, and dies.

(By the time of his death another day may have dawned.)

6. 'to no Palatine.' A state without a king? or one that never actually existed? Cp. Bk. IV., l. 1000.

17. 'stibadium.' A semicircular couch.

21. 'a whim.' The coming study of the gradual growth of great things is begun in an offhand manner. Browning, as it were, speaks within and to Sordello.

## Ll. 21-79.

*Sordello should remember that a great work can be completed by no one man. The city grows gradually through toil of many hands, each builder improving upon the performance of his predecessor. But, since he is unable to make his ideal State a reality, Sordello's first impulse is to take credit for such a conception and decline the smallest step in bringing the actual government of men nearer perfection.*

**21-59. Through slow development, a set of earth-caves**

But, ere this idea of forming an ideal State entirely pass away, let us bring to mind how a city must be built. Suppose we are the first to put to our hand. We try to devise something or other for mere shelter for this man and that man, down to the worst. Let us dig a hole for them to live in. This done, they ask for an outlook and some light; so we make a loophole in our earth wall. We die; but our son follows. He discovers how to make huts of woven hurdles, cuts down trees and makes rafters, conceives and executes door-posts, and has a narrow escape of hitting on the idea of hinges. Let us wait and behold a still later age. Lo! dwellings of brick and stone! When we dug out our earth houses, we were clad in rough skins; but the builder of this period wears a much finer garb, since it is porticoes he rears. Let

the years roll on — time is nothing to us, who are disembodied spirits. At last a city rises to our view. We enter, and what a change strikes us in the dwellings of our early, humble days! How proud they are now! Sewer, market-place, circus, are all here. In the previous age it was counted a great feat to build a plain aqueduct, but now artificers are tiring themselves out with working on alabaster and obsidian, from which, with nervous anxiety to do their subjects justice, they fashion statues of Jove and Venus for their places above the baths.

**36-49. Becomes a glorious city.**

What a difference, we say, between this magnificent city and the set of scurvy little earth houses we hollowed out! What a difference, too, between its grand inhabitants and the mean-looking creatures of our day! But think! The one is a growth from the other. The building went on step by step, each toiler taking the part he was fit to take, and never proving too good for it, and each time claiming its own particular piece of work. There was no sudden transition from the small to the great; as may be seen from the fact that the substitution of pliant osier for brittle bulrush, then the use of sound wood—both stages on the way to rough-cast work — demanded the evolution of the architect, and was the gradual discovery of a whole age. So it was with the people's luxuries: their tables were maple logs before they were made of the precious Mauritanian wood.

"But it would be better," say you, Sordello, "to combine all the workers of all the ages into one arch-builder, who in a lifetime would accomplish the whole building." Nay! For, even if a perfect city could suddenly spring up now, the people would not be fit to live in it: they are always of their own time. They would be too little developed to know how to keep their beautiful robes from stain and tear, or to distinguish good wine from bad.

Sordello did not yet perceive the truth of all this

**59-79. But Sordello would rear the ideal State in a lifetime, or do no work for it at all.**

"It was a happy stroke," he said, "to conceive so suddenly the ideal State. Fate cannot deprive me of that credit. I was a fool, however, to imagine that she would let me work it out. Here, as in the case of all my visions, she spites me in denying me the power to execute things beautifully conceived."

As he sat upon the terrace and threw away the powdery aloe-stalks he had plucked, he beheld the walls of his Shining City drop in pieces, and its variegated pillars and majestic hills fade into a mist. "Lovely ideal, the last and loveliest of my dreams, depart."

42. 'obsidian.' Lava as glass.

43. 'fulgurant.' Thunderous-looking.

57. 'Mauritanian tree.' The citrus-tree. Its wood was fragrant and costly. Mauritania was the modern Fez and Morocco.

60. 'demiurge.' Maker of the world (from δήμος and [ἔργω]: lit., 'a worker for the people').

64. 'fresh-chalked.' Chalk was used to cleanse garments.

'brack' (break). A flaw in cloth.

66. 'Mareotic juice.' Wine from Lake Mareotis, in the north of Egypt.

'Cæcuban.' The Ager Cæcubus was a marshy district near the coast in the lower part of Latium. Its wine held the first rank till the time of Nero, whose canals damaged its vineyards.

75. 'cusps.' (Lat. *cuspis*, 'a pointed end,' 'a lance.') Cp. l. 297 and l. 307.

79. 'last of my dreams.' His first was the dream of acting out Apollo in real life; his second, of revealing him to men through poetry.

## Ll. 80-303.

*No sooner, however, has Sordello bid his vision of the ideal State depart than it dawns upon him that, while a man may see the perfect whole, he should be content to take, in actual work, one step toward its realisation. His day brings his opportunity. Moreover, he cannot be absolutely original, but is rendered fit even for his one step by work done in the past. From within the*

*Imperial there grew the Papal power, which, far from ideal, has developed into the power that can best profit the people of Sordello's day, and is the one that claims his support. The only help he, with all his genius, can now render is to use his eloquence to persuade Taurello Salinguerra to keep the Emperor Frederick away from Lombardy.*

Then Sordello began to see his grand mistake: finding it impossible to attain his ideals, he had done nothing. A low voice (like that of the priestess when she explained to the Lydian king how his life's great error had been caused by his misinterpretation of her oracle) crept into his heart.

80-99. While beholding the ideal, a man must be content to use his limited opportunity of doing actual work.

"Sordello! awake to the truth. God has granted two sights to a man—one of the completed plan of things, the other of the first step he must take toward it in his own allotted time. What, then, fades out of his life but the hope of being able to accomplish everything at once and to perfection—a hope which, coming first, was granted him only to give him heart for his particular day's work? Why should we expect the ideal to become at once the actual? What is gone, in your own present case, but the ideal of a State, which you would fashion without a gradual upbuilding? To begin with, perfection would be evidence that you are God: be content to be man. Let your eyes descend from the towers of the finished and perfect City—be content, that is, to admit that the attainment of the ideal is impossible. That is not to say there is nothing worth doing. Is there no work to be done about the foundations of the structure, destined to be incomplete for ages?

100-105. And, at his best, he is a growth from the past.

"Now, it is a pity to tell you, Sordello, who believe you have sounded the depths of fate's ill-nature, that she is worse than you have yet realised; but there remains the unwelcome truth that even one's limited opportunity of accomplishment grows out of the past and its work. The race is greater than the individual; and when a

man is called great we must go to his forerunners to find the sources of his greatness.

105-119. The poet is.

"Take poetry, your own profession. Apart from pieces done in imitation of a predecessor's, look closely at the poet himself and you will see that his poetic soul is complex. The mind of some earlier poet, dim but recognisable, has been wrought into his own. All Sicily is hushed to hear the song of Alcamo, but that is woven into the bardic spirit bequeathed by Nina; and Alcamo's name, therefore, we must not fondle as though the beautiful result were the fruit of absolutely original genius. The older is incorporated with the younger, Alcamo's grace being a development of Nina's vigour. Search as you may, you will never find a whole and perfect poet. Every one of the craft only works toward the ideal, and is aided even in that by what has been already done. So will it be till the end of time shrouds all in darkness, or, we should rather say, till in a new order of things the present order is forgotten.

119-205. The world's great actors and causes are.

"The same applies to the great workers of the race, whom we call 'ideal': they, too, grow out of the past. (Thousands of illustrations crowd in upon us, but, in consideration of your frightful ignorance of human life and history in general, we select a few that you will understand.) Were you, Sordello, the first to conceive the idea that the multitude are a body of which a genius may act as the impelling and controlling soul? Several have acted so, though in different ways, and with different results. Who devised, amid the disorder of the crowd, the sudden upspringing of a flower? The tumult subsides, and round the magic lily is quickly formed a ring of breathless men, in which every one is eager to find a place at any cost. So it was that Charlemagne became the moving power of the multitude. Of what nature was his power? He was joy itself—one who, possessing unbounded health and strength, and being destitute of sympathy with suffering and failure, was accordingly

126-140. Within Charlemagne's empire of sheer force

strong. A powerful government, established by personal, worldly force, is what one would expect from that confident forehead and those wide-opened eyes, in which may be read his assurance that whatever he aims at he will obtain—eyes in which there lies the calm which follows the unappalled quelling of some opposing force. Not a trace of doubt in the ample cheek, which descends in graceful curves to the end of the upthrust lower lip! He wills: doubt as to carrying out his will there is none.

140-150. Grows up the Papal rule,

"Ages slip away. Could you, Sordello, prying into the work so far accomplished, have discovered that, within the clans governed by sheer force, there lurked a company distinct, at first, from these clans only in having priests instead of military governors and popes instead of sovereigns (this company submitting to the same rule as these other clans, and having the same outward interests—only, in fact, asking permission to live, and free from all purpose of aggression on the Imperial power within which it grew up)? Could you, Sordello, at that early stage, have seen that the germ of power in that small sect would develop into a soul for the multitude, the body to which a certain coherence and unity had been given by the work of Charlemagne? Note how the Papal idea of government grew. Is it so sure, men began to ask, that God's Church cannot exist apart from a king's investiture? Then look to the last step in the conflict. The Papacy and the Imperial power come into collision. After the shock of their contest is over, the Imperial authority and protection have passed away like a column of dust from the downfall of some erection. They may have been thrust aside prematurely, but at least the true outline of the city of man remains, the secular power having served as scaffolding while the fabric was being raised.

150-161. Which learns to assert itself against the Empire's,

"It was Hildebrand who demolished the scaffolding. Behold him stand, resting upon his weapon of destruction. Furrow upon furrow, his forehead is welded as in a forge, and overhangs dim and receding eyes. His

161-176. As it does successfully under Hildebrand.

teeth clenched, his neck like whip-cord, and his chin deeply troughed, his aspect is one of gloom, as though a cloud mantled his head while thoughts wrestled within like grim prize-fighters, he in agony the while, till the victorious thought leap up and his will, the slave for whose service they were fighting, be ready to go forth like a flame whither that thought may command. Full of pain and strain, Hildebrand is no man of buoyant heart —no lily. Rather call him a mandrake, dwarfed and blasted in its birth. He is the product of excessive suffering, thence a feeling soul, and stronger than the unfeeling Charlemagne.

176-190. The two powers having long contended,

"In this first period of the contest between the Empire and the Papacy both used the weapons of this world, the one to establish a government of physical domination, the other to enforce moral ideas. For fully three hundred years men suffered both good and evil between the two powers that were so closely connected and held on side by side. Disregarding their followers, we find that each side shows a regular succession of outstanding workers-out of its policy. Across that space of time the Imperial crowns are carried by Heinrich, Otho, and Barbarossa, while the Papal authority is upheld by Alexander and Innocent. Neither chain of workers betrays a break, but each cause was the cause of two or three individuals, and had no gift of help for the common people. After Hildebrand, however, a popular element begins to develop within the Papal power, and proceeds to strengthen itself at the expense of the Imperial. Is it Innocent and Alexander, just mentioned together, who alone support the claims made by Hildebrand? No! The Crusades take their rise, gaining their strength from all kinds of men, from Peter the Hermit down to the serf that first dares to say he disowns allegiance to Frederick as long as the Papal excommunication rests upon him: power is obtained by means that are not physical. Again, the Papacy is strengthened by the League, which is a plan by which

191-197. The Papal gains on the other through the Crusades

197-200. And the League,

force is used against pernicious force. Yet once more, it is strengthened by God's Truce—the checking of warfare by the preaching of the duty of peace by Mantuan Albert and many another down to St Francis: a moral power entirely supersedes physical force. (201-205. And, later, by the Truce of God).

"But in speaking of this last help, we are looking into the future. Who will take the next step in Sordello's age, which demands a power with a combination of the qualities of Charlemagne and Hildebrand? Neither lily nor mandrake must he be, but a gourd. Feeling for the people's woes, he must yet not scruple to use physical power in furtherance of moral good; and, so far feeling, yet so far unfeeling, he shall be stronger than either of his forerunners. But why should the next worker be such? Why should he not establish a moral government by purely moral means? Is this not the step Sordello should take? No! the time for that has not come. One who means to help men in this age of Sordello must still support the Papal cause. Grand as was the task performed by Hildebrand, who bore a burden beneath which he groaned, he left much to accomplish. Under the stroke of his mighty arm the physical force of Charlemagne, which acted as scaffolding for the erection of the Papal fabric, fell; but, as appears now, it was not totally destroyed. Some of its pillars swayed only to return to their place again, and some may have been mistaken for part of the building itself, and therefore left untouched. The scaffolding of force cannot, indeed, be altogether dispensed with yet; accordingly the next helper forward in human government must tighten what remains of it. For an age or two moral rule must be supported partly by force, partly by purely moral influence. 205-228. The next worker will best help men by supporting the Papal cause.

"It is only after this stage is completed that Sordello would, he believes, find a free course for his genius in acting as the vivifying moral power in the life of the multitude; and if time would divulge its secrets we might be able to say with what success such a one as 228-234. Sordello would support a cause for which physical force is unnecessary.

he would meet. There is no progress for him, he is tempted to declare, till all necessity for physical force has passed away, discarded as scaffolding that has served its purpose.

**235-261. Meanwhile, being idle, he is living but half his life.**

"Meanwhile, Sordello, if you are disposed to pass the few remaining years of your life apart from the strife of the men and causes of your own day, in which the Papacy is being supported partly by worldly weapons, like those of the Lombard League, who objects? It is for yourself to object. Bear in mind that, as you are the soul of mankind, you will, if you remain inactive, live but half a life. Ferrara, the tortured city, has made its appeal; Goito is left behind. To desist from the strife is to be as you were in that retreat—only half yourself. The warrior part of you may still, as it did there, fling away real swords when it finds them difficult to wield, and may gain the essence of military joy by recognising yourself, in imagination, as the greatest soldier on earth; and the poet part of you may spurn actual verse, which so contracted and marred your conception of the beloved one, and may, in imagination, indulge in perfect visions of her beauty. In that case, to please yourself need be your only law—and at one time you could please by your dreams what you took to be yourself. But that was really no more than half yourself. All is different now you have discovered that mankind is part of yourself, even your body. Fancy will no longer suffice; for how can the one half of you get away from the other? Only one or two actual little things can you do for the people now; but if you flinch from these (as you did from the real sword because you could not at once wield it with skill, and from verse because it so tamely expressed your vision of the beloved), then, while one-half of you, lolling among the vines, completes in every detail the ideal State, see whether mankind, the other half, will be saved a single tear or helped to a single smile.

"And how much that body needs your help! Dwell

upon the awful state in which the rabble of wretched Ferrara lies. They sit waiting to be slaughtered. The poor reckless soldiers make their low rhymes on Richard, in which, to cheer one another from the hillocks where their war-engines stand, they tell how 'Club-Foot,' as they call him, 'is in a pitfall now.' Look at that crippled, slavering idiot, who recounts how his limbs were lopped off, and is wriggling round the archers on his head to earn a bit of their bread; and at Cino, always weeping where his spur dug up his mother's head; and at the wretch who has been one piece of gangrene since, clad in a coat of raw sheep's hide, he worked his engine during a double watch under the broiling noonday sun. Think of dandy Lucchino, who lies cut in two in this his first place of battle,—a mere lad he was, young and foolish enough to creep round the southern wall, Tomà (where Richard is imprisoned), for some late orpine, because, forsooth, Marfisa, whom he never saw before, was dying for flowers. Think of dead Tiso's wife, the pretty creature all were once so quick to please, giving birth to his child on that heap of filth." (Here the moaning of the wind rose like a prophecy of woe from the line of pine-trees below.)

261-293. Yet how sorely the people, his other half, need his help!

"What if, as you begin to perceive, Sordello, now that your life seems drawing to a close, you, who have remained apart, plucking from Goito's moss purples like the edges of a consul's robe, or plucking, as you do now, dry aloe-stalks like fasces (to speak in the language of your great Republican State), are the man to whom fate, in this very age, brought her whole inheritance of opportunities? Most of these are now gone — you never seized them—but seize upon the last: since talking is your trade, persuade Taurello Salinguerra to ward off the Emperor Frederick from Lombardy. Fail in that; then"——

293-303. To persuade Taurello to keep the Emperor away is Sordello's last chance of serving them.

82. 'a Lydian King's distress.' The oracle of Apollo had foretold to Crœsus, King of Lydia, that if he made war against the Persians he would overthrow a great power. After he was de-

feated by Cyrus he asked an explanation of the Pythian priestess, who replied that he might have asked whose kingdom was meant (Herodotus, Bk. I., ch. xcii.)

93. 'the vanity.' That we cannot attain all need not make us count as vanity the part we can attain.

106. 'mimes.' In the connection the name cannot be used in the technical sense of certain kinds of plays representing scenes from low life.

109. 'Alcamo's.' Ciullo d'Alcamo. His date, and even his place in Sicily, are uncertain, but probably his poems were written not later than 1193. An English translation of one of them, with a note on the poet, will be found in D. G. Rossetti's *Early Italian Poets.*

111. 'Nina.' "Who for the love she bore to Dante of Majano, a Florentine poet of her own time whom she had never seen, came to be called the Nina of Dante, and who is perhaps the oldest of Italian poetesses" (Tiraboschi's *Storia della Letteratura Italiana*).

115. 'each neutralises each.' How? Does it mean that the poets are equal, Nina having the strength and Alcamo the grace —his strength being his predecessor's? In the unrevised edition the reading is—

> "Take Nina's strength—but lose Alcama's grace?
> Each neutralises each then!"

And Browning probably meant: "If you took only what is absolutely original, you would have one poet of strength and one of grace, and so they would cancel each other; but you would never have a new development—a poet of strength and grace."

118. 'the shutting light.' In the unrevised edition the reading is—

> "Search further and the past presents you still
> New Ninas, new Alcamas, time's mid-night
> Concluding,—better say its evenlight
> Of yesterday";

which shows that 'mid-night,' being considered too strong, is modified to 'the evenlight' or 'shutting light of a forgotten yesterday,' which does not imply the end of all things.

122. 'phantasms.' Perhaps this should be taken to mean the shades of departed workers in the world's great causes.

131. 'the lily.' What is the legend referred to here?

179. 'the two.' The chronology involved in the names about to be mentioned makes it impossible to take this as denoting Charlemagne and Hildebrand.

183. 'Heinrich.' Henry III. (d. 1056), who deposed and appointed Popes.

183. 'Otho.' The Great (d. 967). See Bk. I., l. 197.

184. 'across.' Charlemagne died in 814, and Hildebrand (Gregory VII.) in 1085. 'Full three hundred years,' ending in Sordello's time, must begin before Hildebrand's date—perhaps when a company began to grow up 'amid the other clans' (l. 143).

185. 'Aix' Iron.' The Lombard ('Milan') crown was the iron one, containing, as legend records, the nails that pierced Christ on the cross.

186. 'Alexander.' The Third, who excommunicated Barbarossa in 1160, and was concerned in Thomas à Becket's case.

'Innocent.' The Third (d. 1216), the founder of the Inquisition. He preceded Honorius III.

For the history of these Popes, see Milman's *Latin Christianity*.

193. 'Claremont.' In Auvergne. There (1094), in consequence of Pope Urban's address and Peter's previous preaching, the Council declared itself the army of God for the recovery of the Holy Places.

195. 'the Pope's curse.' See Bk. I., l. 199.

198. 'the carroch's.' See Bk. I., l. 317.

206. 'next step.' Lines 201 to 205 being an anticipation, the next step, which should follow the League, or trick of turning strength against strength, is work 'part by Strength and part by Knowledge' (l. 227). It is the third stage, and here Sordello should have found his place, but he wished to work in the fourth stage, anticipated as above. The fourth stage has, in fact, not yet come. We all believe in moral suasion, but we have not dispensed with our police force.

217. 'Why hast Thou.' Is this utterance historical, like "I have loved righteousness, and hated iniquity, therefore I die in exile"?

244. 'that marred.' Language would not express his vision clearly enough. See Bk. II., ll. 570-573.

245. 'Elys.' See Bk. II., l. 77.

273. 'Cino.' See Bk. IV., l. 91.

279. 'hacqueton.' Or 'acton.' A leather jacket worn under a coat of mail.

286. 'Tiso's.' See Bk. IV., l. 614.

297. 'aloe-shafts.' Cp. l. 75 and l. 307.

298. 'fasces.' A bundle made up of rods and an axe, with which criminals were scourged and beheaded. It was carried before the highest magistrates by the lictors.

## Ll. 303-363.

*Seizing his last chance, which he intends to use so well that all past neglect will be atoned for, Sordello addresses Taurello Salinguerra on behalf of the Guelf cause, but his speech fails through his self-conscious egoism.*

**303-324.** Sordello pays a second visit to Salinguerra to plead for the Guelf cause.

"But I will secure this latest chance," cried Sordello, leaping up. "If I do, I may yet redeem the past, the work demanded by which was to help the Guelfs; now I will help them, however irksome the task may be." Shaking out of his doublet the aloe-stalk with which he had trifled, he paused, and then proceeded calm to Taurello's presence. "Your spokesman, then," said the soldier in his big voice to Palma, as he turned his large head, "is the fortunate child of Elcorte? Few men of a profession like his"—so he finished a speech no doubt addressed to Palma, who sat silent by his side—"have diversified my sober councils. Go on, Elcorte's son, our lady's minstrel with so much to say."

The light of the slowly setting sun floated back and, making its wonted track from the lattice overlooking the pine-trees to the Imperial eagle on the wall, suddenly outlined Salinguerra's mighty form, and gently rested on Palma's contour: day seemed to be keeping night off for a time—a token that to Sordello, in spite of all he had left undone, one chance was left.

**325-363.** His speech fails through his self-conscious desire for effect.

And much he made of this speech, which was to be efficient enough to make up for his unprofitable past and prove a service that would give credit to the rest of his life! To win over Taurello Salinguerra, body and mind, to the Guelf cause—did his marvellous rhetoric attain that? It failed. But the failure was due chiefly to his inveterate habit of self-consciousness—of speaking, not to give out straight what he felt, but with a view to the effect of his words upon others. How would his hearers regard his condescension? Before he gave proof

of it by his pleading, who would have supposed that he, a very god at Goito, could so lower himself at the call of duty as to dwindle into a mere Guelf? Amid the flattery of himself on such goodness, his inner self peeped forth at the outer self as it performed in speech, and stole a glance, now at Palma, now at Taurello, to note whether her colour rose or his lip moved while he urged the need of purging Lombardy of the Ghibellin barons. The poor outer or speaking part fared badly, not receiving its proper nourishment of feeling and thought from the inner part, which was in this way busy watching for effect. But, though the speech of this man of genius was a failure, good-humoured Salinguerra, who, never thinking about himself, had tact in deed and in word, looked as though the minstrel's plan were well to the purpose and he himself found interest in every point pressed by his new teacher. He left off playing with the white wax seal of the Imperial rescript to scrutinise Sordello from top to toe. Surely he is going to agree. No, alas! All he replied was: "What! Poesy makes young people's hair fade sooner than does politics, does it?" This minstrel seemed to think it was an easy matter to persuade Taurello!

311. 'Elcorte's.' See Bk. II., l. 331.

331. 'to that?' "Did his rhetoric ever attain the object of his argument?" As the next lines show, Sordello got the length of the argument, but failed in it chiefly through his egoism. Adopting this interpretation, we should have to supply the thought that there was much—say in Taurello's nature and position—likely to prevent its success. The natural meaning of the words would be: "Was this all his consummate rhetoric was reduced to deal with?" But this would not square with the phrase 'great argument,' which is not likely ironical, and with the introduction by 'yet' of what follows.

339. 'demean.' The word may be used in its strictly proper meaning—'behave.'

341. 'delicious flattery.' Compare the 'one step more in joy,' which he took when he learned to 'live in weakness' (Bk. II., l. 277).

353. 'harangued Honorius.' This can scarcely be historical.

## Ll. 363-413.

*Sordello is horrified to find that his egoism has sapped capacity for work and even for effective speech. There seems nothing left for him but years of idle dreaming, with some reward of poetic reputation after his death. Shrinking from this prospect, he once more, by again addressing Taurello Salinguerra, attempts the task of helping the Guelf cause, and, for answer, is made the object of the warrior's kindly irony.*

**363-385.** Sordello realises how day-dreaming has weakened his moral fibre.

Then a bitter truth flashed upon Sordello. His indulgence in fantasy, he found, could so break and enervate his youth that he had long ago lost all earnestness, and the will to work, and even power to express the idea that work was required. His soul died within him at the discovery. There were no more chances for him, though he craved just the one chance of doing, by supernatural toil (of which as he began his speech he had believed himself capable), what he had left undone, and of making up for his ineffectual past. It was not that he felt his day was done: he saw a melancholy stretch of years before him—plenty of time in which to hope and to despair; now to remember what he might have been and anon to forget it; now to be sad at having lost his chance in life and again to be glad that he had been saved all trouble. In such alternating of moods of grief and self-congratulation he might, as he chose, idling to the end, compose not a few verses in an easy way, and find his stay and comfort in wine—an indulgence which these afflicted people, convinced that the man showed his best self in his poetry, would remember with more than lenity. "But rather," muttered Sordello, "than let them believe that in my bits of verse I had done my duty by them, I would tear out for them the heart of the truth, and give them to know how my task of helping them has been really left untouched." He proceeded, accord-

ingly, to address Salinguerra on his plans for aiding the multitude through support of the Guelf cause.

385-413. His second speech is rewarded with Taurello's gentle irony,

But Salinguerra, who, when Sordello renewed his oratorical attack, had leaned back to hear the better, smilingly began to play again with the seal of the Imperial rescript. The warning boom of the carroch was heard rising from beneath, and, on the other hand, the prætor Tito was waiting for an answer to Frederick; so with courteous irony he agreed with Sordello, whose very words—"Help the Pope and extend the Guelf power, and put everything under the power of the Church"—he echoed. All seemed lost, when suddenly, looking up almost laughingly, he said to Palma: "How would your friend's opinions suit your purpose? Would it not, think you, be best to place our strength at the service of the Pope's principles, let Count Richard Boniface slip away, throw open our gates to the Guelfs, and equip Azzo, their leader, with this baldric? Who, after the powerful appeal made by our friend, will indulge in the ordinary trite disparagement of poets, or say, as Henry of Sicily used to say when Queen Constance wished, in reward for his couplets, to promote Alcamo from his minstrel's post to that of stirrup-holder to the King in time of war: 'Real soldiers for real battle—let minstrels keep their battles for their songs.' Not—to speak seriously—that verse-making is necessarily a thing divorced from common-sense: at Mantua I could have much better borne hearing all this chanted by your friend than the wretched bull-baiting performance with which they regaled me."

379. 'A thyrsus.' The thyrsus, a wand wreathed with ivy and vine-leaves, was the emblem of Bacchus. Cp. Bk. VI., l. 181. Burns celebrations support the interpretation of the passage.

387. 'resumed.' See l. 357.

404. 'censure of the minstrel tribe.'

> "What should the wars do with these jigging fools?
> Companion, hence!"
>
> —*Julius Cæsar*, Act IV. sc. iii.

405. 'Heinrich.' See Bk. I., l. 980.

408. 'Alcamo.' See l. 109.

## Ll. 413-665.

*The contempt expressed by Taurello Salinguerra, while it explodes Sordello's idea that a word from him would exert an immense influence on the practical life of men, spurs him on to declaim how, though he personally has neglected his opportunities, the poet is essentially the most powerful force in human life. It is shown from the different stages in the evolution of poetry that the seer is always ahead of the world's doers, though he is limited in his expression by circumstances—as Sordello, with all his marvellous genius, is now limited to the task of urging Salinguerra to keep the Emperor away from Lombardy.*

**413-427. From which Sordello sees that, in fact, he has no power over men.**

Good! The man who nearly died of vanity shall be saved by the contempt of this warrior. Sordello had imagined that the fortunes of men were specially dependent on any words he might choose to utter: now he perceived that, as far as the reality of the hour went, he had no such intimate bond of union with them. To Salinguerra the bare idea that an awkward, sickly man of no position could have the slightest effect on political life was altogether ludicrous. What would be the loss or the gain to any cause if a poor drudge like this minstrel should, in his desire conscientiously to make the most of his powers of imagination, be led so far astray by his verse-making as to conceive that he could move the world as it is moved by the brain and arm of men of action?

**428-455. Delivered from his self-consciousness, and giving forth a life-truth from the heart,**

That was the significance of the soldier's irony, but not for a moment did his contempt affect Sordello. Taurello scorn the poet! When he and Palma took upon them to question it, they got back the essential truth concerning the poet's high office. Sordello's answer was no stereotyped thing, but rose from the depth of his soul and of his life's thought. Naddo,

when asked a question, had but to look up his mental dictionary for a cut-and-dry answer: Sordello could give forth nothing less than a far-reaching truth, which had grown out of many lesser truths, gradually developed, the one from the others, into a philosophy. A common intellect may swallow ideas in plenty, but, like the food committed to the stomach of Haroun's mechanical man, they remain disconnected, and will be the same to-morrow; whereas, in one like Sordello, they are digested into a single truth for his soul, as Haroun's own food gives him strength to roll an iron camel-collar flat. All the ideas of the minstrel's life had grown into a great truth, new for that age, concerning the poet's office and rank, and were poured forth from his heart before Palma and Salinguerra.

**455-467 and 489-505. And, with the people judging and cheering him in vision,**

And round himself and them Sordello's imagination beheld a ring formed by the multitude, whose right to pass judgment on him he fully recognised. Their faces bent upon him such a look as would keep him from ever returning to the life of idle dream. For their sakes he must fight nobly his first fight on their behalf. They all, it seemed, approved of him for once, and, suspending their judgment upon him for not long ago coming to their help, they chose to wait until, learning from this great effort how much he might have done for them, they would be justified in executing it—in fact, the issue of this struggle must prove him their king ere they could condemn him for failure to exercise his royal functions. And not only the keen sense of the people's claim, but amazement that Taurello Salinguerra should be so blind to the essential power and superiority of the poet, made him forget to watch his own performance: to think that he was there beside the warrior, and that the warrior knew not which was of higher rank!

**473-489. He laments his former selfish evasion of the world's life,**

"By my words now," said Sordello, "I lay my spirit upon thine and compel it, as a vassal, to obey mine, its lord. Only too well I know I am impotent to build up another Rome, but I am hardly so ignorant of what,

to be such a builder, I should have been, as to brook one shame beyond the shame involved in this—that I failed to build when my opportunity was present. Only deliver me from this shame, before which I penitently hang my head—only grant me a new lease of life and allow good chances to come within my reach again—then see whether my influence is not greater than thine, and jeer then, if you can, at my claiming any multitude, however great, as one I can move and bless. That at present, being disgraced by my former aloofness from the interests of men, I must give up my claim to the special reward my work would have earned, and that I must confess that thou, a man of action, art now better fitted to help the world than I, the poet, who was ordained its champion by nature—all this is bad enough; but to behold thee scorn the post of man's chief helper, which I quit and bid thee occupy—to hear thee boast of the minstrel's nothingness, which comes home to me, but only because that nothingness is due to my own fault, is my very despair!"

While Sordello rang the changes on the essential power of the poet, the roof of the presence-chamber sprang up, its dull walls melted away or clad themselves, like Goito's terraces, in vines; and crowds of faces (leaving clear only the strip of rose-light from the setting sun as a vantage-ground from which he might wage their battle) clustered thick about him with wishes and prayers from their inmost heart, because, regardless of consequences to himself, he was at last fighting for their rescue like one who, though mortal, is strengthened in every sinew by the gods. He was Hercules; and to kill this dragon—to strangle Taurello Salinguerra's scorn—was but one of his labours.

505-545. And shows how, as poet, he should have been king among men.

"Whatever I may be now, I was royal, as I have shown you." (So he spoke, closing his proof that the poet must be earth's essential king.) "If I fail, it is not the poet you see quail, but me personally. Caring not to exercise the proper essence of this royalty, I trifled

saucily with its mere accidents—the vivid pictures of my imagination—which were only the heralds of something better to come, and, deeming myself worthy through the display of these conceptions before the world, never exerted my inmost worth—even that in me which was new to the human soul and essentially made me king. The power to express myself at pleasure in any of the forms of life around me on the earth—the power I was most anxious to test—was meant to be only a means to a higher power beyond, the birth of which, as an original thing, should prove my royalty. Now it is too late, I see that the kingship did not lie in my conceiving the very nature of all these forms of life, whether acted out or simply enjoyed within my own soul. They were unalterable shapes cast by nature, and to express myself in an infinite number of them—even if I could at choice have become tree, bird, beast, or human being of this or that type—would have proved me her mere imitator, not the fashioner of a new thing. What would have made me king actually, as I was essentially, was the power, which would have grown out of my understanding of all forms of life and of sympathy with them, to put something new into human history. In imagination I could become anything any of the multitude were—prince, poet, warrior—but the multitude should have become myself: I should have loved, cared for, and served them, as a man loves, cares for, and serves himself. So to have lived in them would be to secure the diadem of my age (for each cycle has its own work, which gives way to the greater work of a cycle to come)—a diadem which, after the limit of one poet's influence has been reached, must be transmitted to the next poet that shall have proved himself the all-commanding power of another epoch.

"To the essentially kingly natures I belong: does the pride of it elate me too much? By no means. Coming in due time, I, though poet, am but one of a series, which includes those of the past who were no poets, but

545-578. The poet is developed from men of action.

were able, by doing some work, to impress themselves upon the world. Has not my present purpose been from the beginning the purpose of all who have aimed at anything? Varying according to time and circumstance, it has been the aim of all of us to move the world toward order and peace. Look to the beginning. There is anarchy, like the seething chaos out of which the earth was formed. There is need of some power of calm to allay the strife. In the dim first times this was a very simple element; before the comely Jupiter there was the rude Saturn. I know the best that is in me" (continued Sordello, noting that Salinguerra was yawning with weariness under this harangue) "is incapable of showing even poorly how those who sought to move men used deeds as their instrument till there dawned poetry, which is the endowment of a mind not different in kind from the mind of the man of action, but only more developed and finer than his—not in kind, because the poetic soul has passed through all previous stages of influence and risen above them into a new power. Thought is the soul of action; it is the poet's function to disengage thought, the soul, from action, the body, and attain a freedom gained by the rejection of such help as that of action, and to affect the world by intellectual means alone. His thought leads men to act, but not by imitating any deed done by himself. Itself superior to the need of action, it produces in others a state of mind by which action is demanded. Thought, in the poet, assigns to men the simpler tasks it used itself to perform as the thought of the world's doers: he conceives the deeds others are to perform. Divest mind not only of action but of thought, and the mind of God dawns above us; but, short of that, all is to be won by the poet.

578-583. The poet can reveal only as the hearers can receive.

"How much, then, is there for me, the individual poet Sordello, to win? Where am I to begin my work? About me flock the earnest faces of the multitude. What shall I unlock from my soul for them?

Behold me ready to bestow whatever they may require of me.

583-601. And poetry is evolved through the Dantesque Epic stage,

"What of life are mortals capable of seeing when I, the poet, make my revelations? Can you receive no more than my judgment on men from their outward history? This you shall have. I set a man before you, and lay stress upon the good or the evil features of his life, while I suppress many a quality that binds the best and the worst together in their common humanity. As I put him in heaven, in purgatory, or in hell, you apprehend whether he is sinner or saint. I shut Frederick in his red-hot tomb; some character hard to determine at first sight, like Agilulph, I engulph in the black chastening river; some unrivalled Matilda I enshrine in the languors of the planet of love—fail, if you can, to estimate them aright when they have been so placed! And, while I do all this, I, with yourselves, shrink from their punishment or delight in their reward.

601-611. The Dramatic,

"Next age, what have I, the poet, to do? The men and women hitherto set down simply as good or as bad I will take from their place again, and, creating certain situations for them, will make them show you their essential character. I will give my events time to unfold their natures gradually till they reveal themselves in their depths; or I will soon break them up into their elements through some great catastrophe. The good character, thwarted by fortune, separates into its fair colours; the evil, given time and opportunity, is intensified from the shadow it appeared at the beginning into dense gloom. Making them act before you, I will let you behold them exhibit all their qualities and passions.

611-620. The Analytic,

"Being proved superior to my audience now, inasmuch as I have made my characters do and suffer as I chose, I should be and remain content if the world—no, that would be expecting too much,—if a few whom my drama has pleased could be cunningly prevailed upon to accept my offer to unveil to them the last of the mysteries I can boast—the revelation of the inner life of a man.

Once more, casting away the external things of actual history, I so analyse a composite nature that you see it in its elements." (He writes *Sordello*, in short!)

620-651. The Elliptical-Synthetic.

"Mark how I rose from stage to stage, and how you, the poet's hearers, have progressed! You are now doing what in earlier times I was glad to do myself,—are suggesting plans supplied to your minds by me, and are clothing with details ideas which I gave you in outline. By this time you, the doers, and I, the poet, talk, as brothers do, in half words and with half names, without detriment from the disuse of the old full terms: hints are enough for us, since we recognise at once ideas which had to be expounded to the first hearers. The adept takes account of what the Past has done; and a touch of his may enhance a principle still fit for service, or may give the quietus to one that the world no longer needs. We do not dwell now upon things commonly understood. It is a brother's speech we need, I repeat, in which a difference of accent is full of significance, and not such explanatory speech as was necessary for an audience of former times, when poet and men of action were scarcely near enough to be called brothers. We are near enough for that now; nor do I regret that there is so slight a separation between you, who have inherited and worked out the ideas of the poets of the past, and myself. These ideas the art of poetry is destined to build up, along with something altogether new, into a nobler structure than has yet been seen; as treasures were gathered from every land and city and, set in St Mark's at Venice, had their old seal of perfection erased by its three domes, and went to form a treasure greater than any of themselves. Ah! for what poet is this reserved? Blessed will he be beyond measure (though even he will find human speech, as it then will be, an inadequate vehicle for his thought); but his work also will be for the people, as it is to the people that I now, casting aside fancies of all that lies within the poet, render the single service of winning Taurello to the Guelf cause

651-665. The poet's work will always be for the people,

and keeping the Emperor away, which this eve I do with my whole mind and heart. For this I would even die, now that I perceive the outrageous vanity of my years of idle dreams, and estimate what makes life worth having. Surely my struggle for the people is right!"

and for them Sordello's single task is now performed.

419. 'visionary tether.' In his own case the tether was visionary, but it would not have been if he had rightly used his opportunities.

430. '"what was."' Cp. Bk. II., l. 120.

442. 'sated.' Satisfied?

447. 'wheel-work man.' Sent as a present by Haroun to Charlemagne. The Caliph's ambassadors brought many other gifts on the same occasion, among them a wonderful clock—the first clock seen in Europe.

483. 'crowd.' The first reading was 'crown.' Both can find plenty of support.

495. 'the rose-light.' See l. 318.

497. 'mere breath.'

> "Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
> Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not."
> —*Macbeth*, Act v. sc. iii.

502. 'Typhon.' (Typhoeus.) A giant with a hundred snake-heads, eyes of fire, and the voices of many animals. Hercules strangled in its own cavern the Nemean lion, born of Typhon and Echidna; and he slaughtered, by crushing its head with a rock and attacking it with poisoned arrows, the Lernæan Hydra, which was also their offspring.

532. 'Let essence.' A man's inner nature must develop itself through the pursuit of a definite aim; so he becomes in some sense original.

533. 'you.' Sordello has spoken in the first person, then in the third, and now he is at the second!

592. 'Friedrich.' The Second. Dante, *Purgatory*, Cantos IX. and X. Anachronism reigns supreme; but of course this harangue is Browning's.

593. 'Agilulph.' Not in Dante. Toward the end of the sixth century he became King of the Lombards through marriage with Theodolinda, widow of Autharis. (Milman's *Latin Christianity*, Bk. III., ch. vii.)

595. 'Matilda.' *Purgatory*, Canto XXIX., &c. Some understand her to be the Countess Matilda.

596. 'languors.' She is in the 'swooning sphere,' or sphere of love, in the Earthly Paradise. See Bk. v., l. 994.

622. 'I.' The poet—not a particular poet. The coming poetry —evidently after Browning's time—is to leave more to be understood. And the interpreter?

'was fain before.' Cp. ll. 546-560.

645. 'Libyan god.' Jupiter Ammon, who was sometimes represented in the shape of a ram, or of a man with a ram's head.

648. 'rifled.' "This church is a treasury of antique columns of porphyry, fine marble, and alabaster, as well as sculptured slabs, collected wherever they could be found, and dedicated to it as jewels to a shrine." (Lethaby's *Mediæval Art.*)

650. 'Triad.' This no doubt means the three domes of 'the central axis' of St Mark's.

## Ll. 666-739.

*After explaining that his life's work had gone for nothing with Monk Ecelin, Taurello Salinguerra, acting on a sudden impulse, throws the Imperial baldric on Sordello's neck and declares him, as Palma's betrothed, head of the House of Romano.*

**666-690.** Salinguerra complains that his years of service have been nullified by Monk Ecelin.

Sordello's discourse ended, Palma turned with pride to Taurello Salinguerra, who, long since recovered from his surprise at the minstrel's performance, said: "You love him—to give the gist of what you would take a long time to tell. Now, first read the charge your father has sent me, his friend, in the missive you brought. You know it already? I guessed as much. He lets the Pope know of a certain project, and offers him the best of your possessions if he will allow the rest to go quietly to his sons—to Ecelin a strip of territory the cursed Vicentines will soon wrest from him, and to Alberic a patch that is already as good as got by the Trevisan; whoever can may grab the other places. All must go, and with them go my hopes. This eve, which is the crisis of our fortunes, there is lost what it cost me no little trouble to secure. In fact, the thirty years I have spent in fighting I might

as well have spent, like our didactic friend here, in doing nothing. But each of us follows the bent of his nature, and I may be just as absurd as he is, since, as he now thrusts himself as an influence upon those with whom his words go for nothing, I have been thrusting my labours upon this Ecelin, who blows them away with a breath. Nay, my young minstrel, I submit you fare twice as well as I, for after all your words have not been entirely without effect: you have decided a course for me. I will leave Romano to look after itself. After all, is that the only House one can serve? Are your 'Ecelins' and 'Alberics' the only sounding names with which to head a cause? If there's a prize to fight for, like this of the headship of the Emperor's party in Lombardy, can no competitors succeed unless they style themselves 'Romano'? If it were only worth my while to take it for myself! But an obscure place, with plenty of work, suits me; we want a youth for head —one to do the grand business—to attitudinise—to fight a little, to talk more, and, most of all, to flaunt our badges. How it might be done if we had such a youth I could make clear, since the Emperor's intentions lie here in this rescript—pity they are likely to lie long enough! For me there is little use contesting for the prize: I am but a vassal, you are my overlords. Nay, contradict me not, gentle Palma! Or wait! Your sweet self be the head of your House! If only Palma were the representative Romano for me to work with! If her tender neck could endure the cumbrous adornment of this baldric, she should—or might not some one wear it for her? Stay! I have not been so much flattered for many a day as by your pale minstrel friend. Bacchus! A little help would lick him into shape. His neck is broad enough, and, besides, he has a ready tongue. Too wrinkled he is no doubt, but young, and that's the main thing. Why, look ye!"

690-709. He would raise a new party if he had a young man to act as head.

709-739. Suddenly he makes Sordello, as Palma's representative, head of Romano and the Ghibellin cause.

And the baldric was thrown across Sordello's neck.

"This badge," continued Taurello, "makes you alone head of Romano. It becomes a grand ornament on your bare neck, whereas it would only interfere with my shoulder-plate."

It was the mad act of a moment. Raising his arm, he had not so much as dreamed of so bestowing the badge; but on a sudden impulse, begotten of the thought that this time he had dallied too long with the idea of personal leadership, the thing was done. At once, however, he accepted the situation thus created, and proceeded, like the man he was,—excelling in service, and only in service feeling happy,—to say that he would make Sordello liege-lord and more. "What is there in my face to pore upon so?" he said to the minstrel. "Ponder this, that you are Romano's head! We cannot slacken pace now we are so near the goal of my efforts —the overthrow of Azzo's House. For you there remains marriage with Palma; for me, one crowning effort ere I retire like Ecelin from the strife!"

718. 'writhled.'

> "Alas! this is a child, a silly dwarf;
> It cannot be this weak and writhled shrimp
> Should strike such terror to his adversaries."
> —First Part *Henry VI.*, Act II. sc. iii.

732. 'What's to pore.' The truth of their relationship is beginning to dawn upon Sordello. Cp. l. 742.

## Ll. 739-816.

*Sordello and Taurello Salinguerra mysteriously recognise each other in their relation of father and son, and Palma tells the story of Sordello's birth and concealment at Goito as communicated to her by the dying Adelaide.*

739-747. Taurello Salinguerra and Sordello are father and son.

Thereupon there happened a strange and solemn event. A change came over them, and, as they looked one upon another, there grew up, without a word spoken, the truth that Sordello was Salinguerra's son.

When the giddiness and haze cleared from their heads they were sitting quietly together, Sordello with the baldric on, and his father silent, though appearing to grow bigger every moment; and at midnight Palma, who understood the meaning of the thrill that had passed between the two, was still relating something Adelaide confessed a year ago when dying on her breast, about a contrivance made on the night on which Ecelin was born amid the riot at Vicenza.

747-765. Palma reports Adelaide's dying confession.

"The convoy of Adelaide and her party"—so ran her story—"being cut off in its retreat, was hemmed round by the ferocious fire that raged through the city and made its buildings fall to ruin. Her fine, rich hair outspread, Retrude lay wounded, using her whole body to cover and protect her child, and, as they lifted her, Taurello Salinguerra's shout, piercing the tumult here and there as a tongue of fire darts through smoke, waxed mightier and mightier to cheer on his Mantuans and to drown Ecelin's cries of helpless lamentation. Could Adelaide fail then to see who was the chief by nature, if not in name? The perception of Taurello's overwhelming superiority made her behold a vision. Her infant, turned to a youth, stood up in her view with eyes more haggard than the search after an inheritance lost for ever could have made them: why gave they forth such glances of rage and of keenly wounded feeling? Because his inheritance had gone to the son of his father's liegeman. She beheld a new shape—Taurello Salinguerra's son—gloating over the discomfiture of the familiar form of her own son; and, amid the many wreaths this new shape wore, the most glorious was the wreath that had been her son's before Taurello won it by his prowess and gave it to his child. Now, in her vision, as she beheld all this, she regarded her weakling husband with scorn and hate and rage; but these passions came too late to impel her to guard against calamity: the mischief was done. Then, she thought, looking back, still in vision, with

Taurello's bravery at Vicenza

765-778. Caused Adelaide to see in vision her House overthrown by Taurello's.

this scene before her eyes, to the Vicenza night—then was the time to act—then she could have done something, and no rival's foot would ever have spurned her House to earth.

**778-794.** To prevent which, she had Retrude and Sordello conveyed to Goito, where Retrude died

The vision gone, and a certain plan forming itself in Adelaide's mind, they bore away Retrude and her child to an obscure retreat. Retrude was not slain, but all pain was gone, as they knew best from this, that, when they raised her, pale and still, her head would turn this way and that, always to settle (gracefully, they said, as the reed in the wayside morass steadied itself after being shaken by their tread) with the old smile when she was suffered to behold her child. So they marched on, no sign of change in their charge to disturb them till, as they reached Goito, she shed a few tears and died.

**794-816.** And Sordello was kept concealed.

So far no actual harm had been done, though the action was rash. They laid her in the marble font, Taurello's own gift, and it became her child's custom to sit there, eve after eve, beside one of its statues. As for Palma, she would blend with the magnific spirit of Sordello, as they called Retrude's child, whatever his fortune; but she would scarcely have dared to disobey Adelaide, who had scared her into vowing that she would never disclose the secret of his birth, the mere hint of any concealment of the kind having struck such a chill of horror to the heart of Ecelin that, to the end, she contrived to keep from him that Taurello's child was alive; for she feared lest, the warrior being enlightened by her husband, her vision might be fulfilled. This course, in which lay the crime of concealment, Palma was forced to allow, and her connivance was rendered easier by the account she received of Salinguerra as a man of cold nature and little inclined to trouble about his own position. Now, however, set free by Adelaide's death to impart the secret to Ecelin, she undertook to restore to Sordello his own inheritance and add to it her own, and removed from fact the mask it had worn for years.

742. 'a truth grew.' Is such recognition possible? Sleep and death may reveal to a third person the likeness of one person to another, but how can one see in another a resemblance to one's self? Besides, thirty years have passed since Taurello looked upon Sordello, then a child. Could the recognition be the work of instinct?

752. 'Their convoy's flight.' Compare the account of the 'Vicenza night' in Taurello's soliloquy (Bk. IV., l. 697 *sqq.*, and in Bk. II., l. 321 *sqq.*)

767. 'burst swathe.' Burst his swaddling-bands — suddenly appeared as grown-up.

779. 'complete.' In her mind.

795. 'No crime.' Why? Cp. l. 779 and l. 808. It may mean that in any case Retrude and her child would have been carried to a quiet place.

796. 'Taurello's very gift.' Cp. Bk. IV., l. 144.

799. 'would blend.' Meant to blend — was determined to blend.

805. 'half-recital.' Did she begin to present a hypothetical case?

815. 'The mask.' This cannot mean a mask Palma had worn, for Adelaide's confession had been made only a year before (l. 750).

## Ll. 817-1010.

*Taurello Salinguerra, having now his own House to toil for, will fight with such heart that he will establish a power independent even of the Emperor. Sordello desiring to be left alone, Palma withdraws the warrior to a gallery below, where he excitedly enlarges on his schemes of conquest till a sound overhead recalls them to the presence-chamber.*

817-825. Taurello declares that he has retained his great strength to win an inheritance for his son.

When Taurello Salinguerra, who, with folded arms, had remained silent for some time after Palma's tale was ended, did speak, he spoke with a laugh, almost as if he mocked the minstrel. Sordello, he said, need not do anything. Fate would not defraud him of what should have been his son's in infancy, much less of what should have been his in youth. Reserved for the

very purpose of making it up, he himself had remained young in brain and arm. That they had been kept apart was the best thing that could have happened, since their meeting now would mean no ordinary idle intercourse, but came as a splendid chance, arising from a happy juncture of affairs. He then hurried to explain to Sordello how the profession that he would listen to the envoys of the Lombard League was a blind, it being already arranged that Frederick must advance through Trent and Verona to Rome, there to overthrow the power of the Church, and to institute in the Alpine parts a prefecture of Lombardy. "That's the plan at present," he continued, "but there's no prophesying what may happen under a new monarch—one born at Gesi, who is spending his youth at Naples."

826-836. That the Emperor is coming to Italy.

"Embrace him, madman!" cried Palma, perceiving from the drops of sweat that broke as he laughed and from his whitening lip to what a strain he was subjecting himself in denying scope to his natural affection. He did not embrace Sordello, however, but laid his son's hand again and again on his own face.

836-840. His natural affection gets a chance.

All this time, with thoughts and fancies rushing through his brain, Sordello also was greatly moved. He pressed his hand upon his head, and made a sign that they should let him be. Taurello, however, continued to speak, still laughing, though not in quite the same unnatural manner. "The best is to come! We will not only scatter like chaff these Guelfs, from whom that despicable monk Ecelin recoils, but refuse to play into the Kaiser's hands. Think you it is for Frederick I will toil? Think you it will be he who shall fill up the huge gap I will make, to the people's admiring astonishment, in the ranks of our enemies? The place hewn out is mine — that is, yours. I tell you that for some such independent power I have been working all along—blindly, no doubt, and in an offhand manner, and while serving another, yet with some instinct at my heart. In the absence of that instinct I should have

840-875. On Romano's present possessions he will rear a power independent of the Emperor.

turned aside from my labours; whereas now—look what I have secured! My cunning has preserved for us Samminiato, a central place, which secures us Florence by land as Pisa is ours by sea: with Pisa, Florence, and Pistoia ours, we can annex territory at our leisure. Again, on Brescia, Milan, and Piacenza, strongholds of ours, and gloriously situated at suitable distances, which at first stood as posts of the enemy on the flank of our march of the Trevisan, — ah, I forgot you knew nothing of our doings, — we set Romagna and Bologna as the key-stone of our arch, the first span of which covered the Trentine and the Valsugan. Sofia's Egna, beside Bolgiano, is secure to us too."

So Taurello Salinguerra talked on. Half of all this was delusion, and the rest not altogether true; but with him everything was as good as done, so confident he felt, as he wrung off the rings of his shoulder-piece one after another to give his sword-arm free play, that he could accomplish whatever he desired. Yes, it was the sword he had need of now! His own strong arm would compensate for Sordello's physical weakness! And here one notes how Taurello, regarding himself as a fighter and nothing else, hardly did justice to his brain. His life had given him the soldier's bent, but, gift for gift, he was a match for any man.

(875-881. Taurello regarded fighting as his one talent, but he had many another gift.)

Palma had listened to him patiently, but now, feeling it was time to take him away, she fearlessly removed each of his arms from his son's shoulders, which shrank beneath their iron grasp, and made him avert his face (all the time you could see his corselet heave to the emotion that worked within) and relieve Sordello, who, set free, rose and tried to speak, but sank back exhausted. They left him alone in the presence-chamber, and all became blank.

882-916. Palma takes him away from Sordello, and, in a gallery below, talks about his son.

Even when reeling down the narrow stair, Taurello, as if unaware that Palma was at his side to guide him, kept up this talk about their fortunes. Something he said about Milan, where "we muster thrice the strength

of the Torriani, who have all along been cowed by our Visconti." So he harped on the same string while obeying Palma's direction to stoop here and there and to thread, by the light of some arrow-hole, the turnings that led to the gallery below. Then he stopped short as Palma let him go. After he had sat for some time in silence, while he splintered the stone bench, she, risking a rebuff, caught his truncheon, though, for the mere sake of speaking, she only began one of Sordello's poems—a poor rhyme about 'Elys' hair'—a line or two from the Goito lay, his first and poorest performance. That ended, and Taurello's brow and open mouth betokening that he expected to hear more than some verses, she went on to tell how every one loved Sordello, and how, even with regard to appearance, his face, though pale, was finer than Count Richard's. The foolish praise, every word of which the father greedily drank, being ended, Taurello drew Palma on his knees and made a framework—a shade, a crown, an aureole—for her face with his hands, and so she had to remain, her little mouth compressed with smiling pain while she felt her tresses twitch in his iron gloves, that he might get the best view of her—might set his saint in the fittest niche. Then he kissed her brow, praised her father for his treason in leaving him in the lurch, and asked how any one could have suspected so much wit in Ecelin. But she must remember that Salinguerra had always been his liegeman; and now she, in the same way as her father had been, was for him head of Romano, and his liege-lady, and therefore had a right to know all he meant to do, as indeed she should. And to satisfy this right of hers he began building scheme upon scheme, not one of which, he said, his foolish boy would be able to understand. But only let Sordello wed Palma—then!

**916-933. Taurello takes Palma as his liege-lady, and she is to wed Sordello.**

**933-963. Marching to and fro in the dark gallery,**

The gallery was a dim, long, narrow place, with one grated window, which showed them the fiery west as some split tomb shows the end of the world to its corpse. The gloom of the wall, the rift of fire at the

grating, then the gloom of the wall again, were opposite Palma as Taurello held her; but at length he set her free and placed her in the one ragged jet of fierce gold fire: how could he begin a new era in the world's history without having Palma full in view? Then, with clenched hands and head erect, he paced the gallery to and fro. His continuous talk and regular tread made a grand monotony, his talk, however, betraying a worked-up confidence, like that of two friends who boast there's nothing to fear when, apart from their determination, their prospects are by no means good. And Taurello did seem to be speaking to some invisible shape when, full of power and pride, he came nearer and nearer out of the darkness with jingling sound and, with his face strained, passed close to Palma in the grating's light (she catching only a snatch of his rapid speech), then trod on in the darkness of the other end till she could tell, from the harsh turn of his heel, a spark struck from the stone, and the crash of some loose nail-studded thong, that he had turned again. By the snatches she did hear, she gathered that, after he and Sordello had gained the upper hand over the prefecture about to be established by Frederick, they, left by that time the sole power in Italy, would fight as they listed, with no superior to give them orders, and would be free to break up the power of the Pope and to build up for themselves an Empire, in which moral elements might have a subordinate place—"if indeed," he added, "we condescend to let the Papacy have any power at all, even under our control." It is enough to say that his illimitable flood of triumphs, which, understood in the light of subsequent history, amounted to nothing more than Ecelin III.'s inheritance, lured Taurello on in his after life till, those he fought for being dead and gone, he saw it was expected he should somehow make good the boastings of his life, and accordingly, when weak and worn, must needs stagger up and fight his last fight at Milan.

**964-999. He excitedly prophesies the erection of an Empire for themselves.**

But when his prophecy of conquest is at its height,

—while he talks with passionate energy as though Italy were his to do what he would with, and says, "Run the cucumber into a gourd—drive Trent upon Apulia," after the manner of those who, looking at the shapes of land, bestowed on places such names as "Morea" and "Drepanum" (strange that three such confessions were made to Palma, with whom—Cunizza, as he called her—Dante spoke in the silence of the Amorous Sphere. We need concern ourselves no more with her: she knew her task of giving Sordello his rights was done, and, being the devotee of her passion for him, cared nothing for her own fortune)—when Salinguerra's prophecy of triumph is at its height, a sound above the passage makes him stop short in his speech and walk: he shrinks back, and his wide-opened eyes ask Palma its meaning. "'Tis Sordello's footstep," she answers. "Give me your hand. He summons us. Idling here in the damp befits us not." They reeled dizzily out of the gallery. "Visconti's strong at Milan," said Taurello, speaking, as Palma used to tell long afterwards, in the old somewhat indifferent tone, as if his spirit, after taking high flight in his prophecy, drooped at that very instant.

**1000-1010.** A sound overhead recalls them to Sordello.

834. 'Gesi.' (Jesi.) Frederick II. was born there, but, as l. 833 shows, he cannot be meant.

860. 'case.' Omit the full stop.

866. 'our arch.' Which springs on the one side from about Milan, and from about Trent on the other, and has its key-stone at Romagna, and Bologna, south of the river Po.

869. 'Sofia's.' Cp. Bk. VI., l. 661.

895. 'Torriani's.' The Torriani and the Visconti were keen enemies at Milan.

909. 'his worst.' From the point of view of Sordello, who felt it had not expressed all Elys, and who indeed was satisfied with none of his performances. It delighted the people, and we are to understand it was really a wonderful song. Cp. Bk. VI., l. 875. Or does Palma say that, fine as 'Elys' was, it was nothing to Sordello's other songs?

926. 'the wit.' Ironical. Who would have thought Ecelin had the sense to further Taurello's fortunes so well?

991. 'grew mulberry leaves.' The Morea is so called from *μορέα*, 'mulberry.'

991. 'sickles.' Several places were named Drepanum, from δρέπανον, 'a sickle.'

992. 'three such confessions.' This one by Taurello, the one made by Adelaide, and — did Sordello confess she was his Daphne?

995. 'Cunizza.' *Paradise*, Canto IX., l. 32. Cunizza was really Palma's sister. (Rolandini Chronicon in Muratori's *Scriptores Rerum Italicarum.*)

999. 'Triumph at height.' Here the sentence begun in l. 982 is resumed after much parenthetical matter.

1006. 'Visconti.' See l. 895.

## Ll. 1010-1026.

*An anticipation of the end of the tale of* Sordello.

1010-1026. An anticipation of the end.

They are gone now—Palma, Taurello, Eglamor, Ecelin. Only Naddo is never gone. This moonlit night he labours to discover what his master, Sordello, meant by his strange way of dealing with the poetic art. "After all," he says within himself, "is Squarcialupo really tainted — indeed I would say putrid — with jealousy? I thought so; but when was Providence put out in the management of human affairs? If the man be spiteful, he seems to carry about his spite without injuring himself—he prospers—whereas Sordello, the great master, lies in his early grave."

The vines at Goito stand stiff and startled-looking, like some detected cheat — rough lines through which breaks the moon, which hangs as a grey, mean scale over against the vault where thou, the maid beside whom he should have sat this eve, remainest with fixed, sad eyes, as if thou didst feel that heaven, in spite of the faith and victory of the poet's death, did not so well to leave thee entirely to death.

While the industrious bee . . . But no longer anticipate. These characters being still to deal with, let their history proceed.

1014. 'Squarcialupo.' See Bk. II., ll. 118 and 793.
'speckled.'

"And speckled vanity
Will sicken soon and die,
And leprous sin will melt from earthly mold."
—Milton's *Hymn on the Nativity.*

1020. 'this eve's Maiden.' See Bk. I., l. 430.

1023. 'victory.' Gained by Sordello over the temptation offered through the Imperial badge. See l. 895 and Bk. VI., l. 615.

1025. 'hermit-bee.' See Bk. VI., l. 621.

1026. 'these in compass.' This seems to mean 'still in our view,' and so 'still to be dealt with.' Compare—

"O'er the flat meadows and indented coast
Of the smooth lake, in compass seen."
—Wordsworth's *Excursion.*

# BOOK THE SIXTH.

## Ll. 1-89.

*Left alone in the presence-chamber of San Pietro Palace, Sordello, turning from the impressive scene of the closing day to the study of his own life, perceives that its failure in joy has been due to the fact that he has had no moon, or star—that is, something not himself, and not meant to display himself for display's sake—to call forth his nature in steadfast activity. While the prophecy of such an orb dwells in a man's heart from the beginning, the orb itself, whereby alone a soul, sooner or later according to its size, is blessed, must be formed gradually out of individual opportunities embraced heartily as they come.*

1-26. Left alone as night impressively descends, Sordello meditates on his past.

THE idea of Eglamor's least like a laboriously wrought-out thought and more like an inspiration, but an idea with no truth in it, was this: "Man shrinks to nothing in the presence of Nature's great works, the symbols of immensity: too small for their vast quietude, he must quail before a calm sky or a calm sea." The saying, indeed, came with its own specious air of truth to Sordello, such was his mood while he watched the evening slowly sink down the terrace to the farther bank till there gleamed on the river one space of light where an expanse of moist sky, like a bay of sea or lake, rested its base on the stream, in which it was reflected ray for ray and star for star, the expanse

and its reflection meeting at the surface in great richness, like the wings of an angel when they are folded in to die. Sordello turned not from this quiet scene till Ferrara's din (which you might compare to the monotonous speech of a man who, interrupted by a new thought, lets slip the first eager purpose that set him talking, but speaks on about it with his mind occupied elsewhere) recalled him. Surely the state of the city would afford him some help in determining his line of action. This eve his fate was taking a pause: ere his life moved forward again he had best put away the new and interrupting thoughts—thoughts of Taurello's voice, large hands, suggestive smile—and take up once more his problem of succouring the people. What light would their state, as shown by Ferrara, throw upon his past and upon his future?

**26-39. There had been nothing at fault in any of his gifts of genius.**

And, at last, all it was important Sordello should learn now—the truth about himself—rose upon him like the moon, which was slowly rising to make the sky complete, and laid bare at his feet all the strife and changes of his history. None of his efforts looked wrong in itself: they had been wrong only in so far as one had checked another; and which of them, as he beheld them now in the sudden blaze of truth, could he suspect as an evil? They were the expression of different moods of his mind, and were all tokens of the existence in him of a transcendent, all-embracing natural power. The

**40-58. But, having no loved object to claim them, they had not been properly exercised.**

mistake of his life, as he now sees, lay here: he had lacked the one thing his gifts required to make them a source of joy to him, and that one thing was an outward influence — a soul, as Palma expressed it in her own case, above his soul, — a power other than himself to uplift his powers. Had there been for him such a moon, or external influence, the great depths of his nature would have swept along on their course from the beginning; but year after year there was no such dominating force, and so his marvellous poetic nature, being never impelled by any

love, now lay torpid and anon wakened up—grew and dwindled at caprice, now dispersing itself in showers and anon gathering its forces into one—now one mass of beauty, and anon racing free like whitest ripples over the reef. His nature found opportunity for much display of its wealth, but it was never gathered up for a steadfast purpose and hurled out, as it could have been with astounding power, toward something not itself. The consequence was that he had been without a function. Others claimed gifts not half so great as his; yet, because they had within them a heart to which appeal could be made by some external influence, and had before them an object of interest for its own sake, — some moon, always superior to themselves, whatever their natural force might be,— they did not miss the crown of life. Every man that lives is meant to gather a certain fruit of his life through having lived up to the full degree of which his nature is capable. Earlier or later there comes a stage in his pilgrimage at which to stop and know the joy of his being. This is the goal to which, along with men of common order, many souls of rare endowment press forward. Always discovering new beauty as existence goes on, they gather together the parts in which it is revealed to them, and so make in the end one star — something unlike themselves, and self-sustained, and far above themselves; and meanwhile, as they add one detail of beauty to another, with the vision of the perfect whole before their eyes, they nurse the dream of being blest and glorified by being themselves claimed and owned by it when some day it will stand over them as the actually completed orb. When a man's star will appear in its perfection depends, as has been said, upon the capacity of his nature: the greater his capacity, the greater is his power to wait. His full joy may be gained in mere beauty of body, or in intellect, or in a combination of physical and intellectual beauty not to be found on

**58-89.** Life's joy must be gained through devoted service of an ever-developing interest: to be superior to this life's chances is misery.

earth; or, in place of an interest like these, he may love and pursue an abstract quality—some aim, or some love, or even some hate: he does not miss this life by waiting for some superior future life, nor chooses what must be hell,—the progress through existence of one who is always above taking what this life offers from day to day, and is always, in virtue of a specially great nature, reaching beyond the ever-widening range of life's opportunities.

1. 'The thought . . . least like a thought.' Cp. 'deeds not done.' (Bk. III., l. 94.)

9. 'one spot.' What phenomenon is pictured in this passage about the angel's wings it is hard to say. The interpretation almost requires that the one spot of light should be on the horizon; but could the horizon be on the river?

17. 'monotonous speech.' The illustration is peculiar. It must mean that Ferrara's din was, as it were, the expression of Sordello's thoughts about his relation to its inhabitants.

38. 'bright or dim.' This seems to apply to 'existence.' Cp. Bk. I., ll. 523-534.

54. 'Of whitest ripples o'er the reef.'

> "And those wild eyes that watch the wave
> In roarings round the coral reef."
>
> —Tennyson's *In Memoriam.*

58. 'Without a function.' Which his life was meant to gain in the service of the Guelf cause, which he should have loved.

73. 'alien glory.' A glory not dependent on any display of what is within them, but derived from their being laid hold of by their 'star,' or absorbing interest.

## Ll. 89-129.

*Aware now that his life's mistake has lain in the want of an object of devoted affection, Sordello yet feels that his nature is too great to be dominated by anything actually existing on earth, and seeks to love and serve, not some miserable creatures around him, but his own impossible ideal of the human race: he would be moon to his own sea.*

One does not imagine that a love like Palma's for

him, or a hatred like that of Taurello Salinguerra for the House of Este, would be great enough to move and control the whole richly gifted nature of Sordello; but why should we doubt that there was some love mighty enough to claim such strength as his—some moon large enough to match the sea of his being? Why should we fear that, when Good can be seen and served, only the Best should prove a deception?

89-110. The Best does not exist.

The answer is that the Best is non-existent: it might be, yet never is. Suppose we desire gems. We might easily imagine that earth is a store of pliant material which, subjected to the plastic flame, will yield them in abundance to the magician's skill: what, then, prevents his bringing into existence jacinth in balls and lodestone in the block? Simply this, that, in the fact of Nature, precious material is found only in a few shreds that enrich the strand or in some narrow veins in the rocks. Suppose, again, we seek creatures we might call perfect. There is life in the tempest; thought broods upon the mountain-tops; there is passion in the woods: why, then, instead of the human forms we see, which no doubt are well enough in their way, can we not fashion men of far finer quality than theirs?

We are too fond of thus arguing, from Good, the Best —from separate forces, one vast combined force—from our little sea, which, when our mood is right, seems sufficient for our wants, a mighty ocean.

111-129. Yet Sordello is willing to be claimed in love and service, not by a few Lombards, but by his own impossible ideal of the human race.

What if—so ran the minstrel's thoughts—there be no external power equal to calling forth Sordello's nature, and his be the prouder fate of finding his attractive and moving force within himself? "Perfection"—let that be his law and his love. Nay, what if all the common laws that are obeyed in the world be truth veiled in partial aspects for the sake of the weaker vision of ordinary men, who would fail to grasp anything more? As they cannot see and work for all that life needs, the wants of a particular time and a particular people appeal to them. But one of stronger vision could be appealed

to by a want that is not embodied in outward circumstance—in no individual person or people—but is perceived only in his own mind: he could endure the whole of truth—could be dominated by his own inner ideal, and work for its fulfilment. So, in connection with Sordello's present problem of helping the people, they were the body to his soul, and therefore were himself; nor was he less impelled to their rescue by pity for them as part of his own being than he would have been had they, as a sickly part, been cut off—as he had once regarded them—from his nature, otherwise in good health; had their woes been counted not his own; and had he been called upon to condescend, with pride at his so doing, to aid them by assisting the small affair of the Guelf cause. He will serve all men through working for his ideal of the race; and there is no reason why he should begin by helping the people of Lombardy in a particular way. Helping in his own grand ways, he will yet be helping them, for the service of his ideal of the race will bring all men right even in this present life.

125. 'as alien woe.' See Bk. v., ll. 337-340.

## Ll. 129-158.

*But in his heart Sordello hears the afflicted people asking what help the love and service of his ideal race will yield to them in their present misery. Let him render some immediate aid, however limited.*

129-158. The crowd cry for succour in their present misery.

"Your purposes are very grand," he hears the people cry. "You will lead us on a splendid crusade. Your lance will soon play havoc with Malek and his Moors, and, ere it has been long lifted up against them, O our champion, your shield will be lined with many a giant's beard. But have regard to facts. Remember your escort. Count the deserts we have to cross before we reach the scenes of battle. Put by your lance and

shield; for half a month we need an axe to cut down the thicket that obstructs our way. Our present hard difficulties cleared away, we will proceed to our picturesque crusading exploits—in a future life!"

Yes, rally together and mock Sordello, O people! Urge your claims! Sordello had need to be roused, for thus did he push to an extreme his sophistry about the ideal race—a sophistry aided perhaps by the waning of his resolution to help the Guelf cause there and then. Accordingly the crowd (which he had contrived to forget as one great suffering mass to dwell on the magnificent things he might do—it would be much easier to put the whole world right by a few brilliant strokes, which could be dealt only in imagination, than to help their dull vulgar grief by accomplishing a dull vulgar task like that of winning over Taurello)—the crowd stood forth and cried: "Now that you have satisfied your stronger vision—have seen and desired to serve the needs of a race beheld as ideal,—meditate on your real want laid bare, with all its ugliness, like a corpse exhumed—the want of us actual men, which, as you are our moving soul and we are part of yourself, is your own want, embodied in us, and claims your service."

140. 'Cydippe.' This, along with Agathon, is a mere name, and has no classical reference.

156. 'content thy stronger vision.' Nominative absolute.

### Ll. 159-199.

*The wretched condition of the people appealing to him again, Sordello remembers that, at the best, all service must be circumscribed, the greatest genius being limited to enforcing but one of the many truths he sees; and conscience declares plainly that the only service possible for him now is to be faithful to his resolution to support the Guelf cause.*

Down from Sordello's vision sank the people as an ideal race in the future, and up they rose in their state

**159-194.** Under the best conditions, the seer can impress upon the world but one of his many truths.

of real misery. But how piteously small must his service of them prove now! How small it would have proved even had he devoted himself to them from the beginning! For let a man with his life before him, the obstacles that had stood in Sordello's way being removed, become aware he has laid hold of a truth the teaching of which would be a help to men—can he get it accepted forthwith and then, since it came as a quick inspiration, expect that he will easily secure many other truths fit for their service? The idea is vain. He must spend a lifetime in binding his first truth on the mind of the poor crowd, though, before they fully grasp it, he descries a host of truths of twice its brilliancy—which he may make forces in the world if he has a life to devote to each!

Then Sordello remembered how certain bards at Mantua were constrained and hampered in their craft —were like buds blasted, though of sweeter perfume than Naddo's rank overblown posy. These men of ineffective genius were as an insane rose that burns out its heart in early odours of peculiar richness—spendthrift in a spring that no summer follows. Such was Dularete, who, perceiving splendid truths he could not get men to receive, took to a life of idleness and self-indulgence, and grew bestial through attempting to do more than can be done by human power. But to surmount the obstacle placed in the way of the poetic genius by this expectation of accomplishing all —to begin with one truth and, living to enforce it, let the others be—is what deserves the crown of praise.

**194-199.** Again pitying the actual crowd in their felt need, Sordello can now use his genius only to prove the Guelf the better cause.

Sordello, recognising this, saw clearly that his poor gleam of truth for the world's help was required at that moment, and he would be true to it: he would dash under foot the Imperial baldric, with all the fortune it might bring him, and would so abash Taurello, and perhaps even yet persuade him to keep the Emperor away. In any case he would attest his belief in the right cause.

177. 'buds blasted.' Cp. Bk. III., l. 217. This passage simply describes Sordello's own experience.

181. 'truths and wine.' Cp. Bk. V., l. 378.

185-194. The logic of this passage is beyond recall. "Because the poet can teach only one truth to his age, however many truths he may perceive, truth must be casual truth. Truth is seen in such small parts and at such wide intervals that the whole truth must always have been present in the world—even the truth which, revealed at once, would put the whole world right. It must always have been in the world, though it has been content to come forth now and again in a faint spark and by some chance, such spark being the hint of the whole truth, which, if revealed, would make everything glorious."

194. 'miserable gleam.' The one small piece of truth Sordello might impress upon his time—that the Guelf cause was the better.

## Ll. 199-230.

*Sordello again indulges in sophistry. His support of the Guelfs will lead to good in the future, but is that good worth the sacrifice of the Imperial badge, with all it can bring?*

**199-230. But is the good estate of the people, which cannot come at once, worth the sacrifice of his Ghibellin fortune?**

Before he dashes down the baldric, however, Sordello asks himself whether this deed will be truly of service to the people. "Ay," he says, arguing with himself, "in the end, no doubt, it will be, but what of the present? Its ultimate effect is clear, but it is not easy to be hearty about each step that leads to that end. If only the service demanded from day to day were as clearly good as is a life's total of service—if the present gave as rich evidence of good as the future will give after much labour—and each day's service were not, as it would appear, too small to make any difference in the amount of evil! There is no doubt that now it is best to maintain the Guelfs in power—that is your life's work,—but see what it involves. In order to support their cause, you will have to adapt each day's work to influencing men of different kinds of character, who must be dealt with, for the sake of the future, only as

they help or hinder that cause; and you, formerly a Ghibellin, must hate what you once loved and love what you once hated. If all the good men of the present were on one side and all the bad men on the other, you would easily determine upon which you should throw yourself; but the thought of the future, with men apportioned thus, can never have the same immediate impelling power over you as the present, with its good and bad in both parties. Are you to spare or destroy so much of value on so slight a warrant? Are you to break the present's perfect sympathies and endure its aversions for the sake of a future so feeble in its attractive force? Is Tito to be ruined through his one small fault of being a Ghibellin, and the Papal Legate saved through the small virtue, and his only one, of being a Guelf? To support the Guelf cause would indeed be a good work, but it would be done at a great cost to yourself: anything gained by it would be counterbalanced by loss suffered through neglecting other work. In order to make a new segment, are you to spoil a circle half made—are you to rise one step toward blessedness with the people you help and sink—well, if it were only to sink one step down, and not rather the destruction of your whole fortunes, that your novel duty of aiding the Guelfs demands!

200. 'once more.' For his first piece of sophistry see l. 145 and its passage.

### Ll. 231-259.

*Sordello still indulges in sophistry. Good is born of evil'; why should the people's evil be removed? Were it not for the evil of their present state, the good of his pity for them would not exist.*

231-247. Besides, we cannot have good without evil.

"Harms to be abolished! What! did prophet speak and minstrel sing vainly when they taught that good springs from evil? Was there no charm in the old

world's faith and courage, born only because there were wrongs to endure or to avenge? There is no good without evil. Fire may devour, but while it burns it gives light; in salt marshes crystals are formed; blood dries to crimson; evil of every kind, in short, is a chance for good. You cannot, then, banish evil without thrusting away good. And why should we try to banish it? Is evil less natural than good? Take no account of the struggle for life in tree or flower, or of the hideous warfare waged among the lower animals (he who seeks to solve its mystery only hears the taunting boast of the angel of Nature, and pleases himself by making believe he understands), and have regard to the actual people about you. Whence arose their claim upon you but from the evil of their state? Is it not the fruit of that state? Any one free from sorrow would not need your help. Whose, for example, was the only happiness you could distinguish in the press of miseries you beheld this morning in Ferrara? It was that of the fool who jeered: 'Thou carriest about thee, in thy very face, green and yellow tokens that thou art Ghibellin.' Much hold he obtained on you! No! If the people's present evil did not exist, neither would there exist the good of your sympathy.

247-259. If these people were free from evil, Sordello's beautiful sympathy would not exist,

235. 'Flame may persist.' Perhaps the interpretation should go the other way. Browning is not at all particular about balancing each of a series of antitheses in the same way. Cp. Bk. v., ll. 65 and 66, and Bk. iv., ll. 636 and 637 (if there be no historical mistake there).

237. 'blood dries to crimson.' Not a very forcible illustration.

245. 'as a child.' When we demand an explanation of the pain that is in the world, we have to fall back upon such a statement as 'Nature is kind at heart, and will put all right in the end,' while we feel this is really no answer. Alfred Russell Wallace explains that beasts have a good time on the whole. The interpretation of the passage, however, may be wrong.

257. 'in thy very face.' A jeer at the stunted minstrel's sallow complexion. Cp. Bk. iv., l. 390.

### Ll. 259-457.

*Sordello continues to indulge in sophistry. It is the conquering of difficulties that makes the joy of life: why, then, should he deliver the people from theirs? He will rather, as he well may as a Ghibellin in high position, extract great joy for himself during his remaining days by oppressing them and making them furnish food for the passions that now summon him. What of a future life? It is unphilosophical to let it affect the present. What of right? At any period of a man's life the right for him consists in whatever then attracts him with greatest power.*

**259-291. And they would miss joy, which consists in overcoming difficulties.**

"Take a higher standpoint and you will see that for men's own sake evil must remain in the world. For what is joy? It consists in lifting up and casting aside some obstruction—in making familiar what was at a distance and peculiar. The attainment of any joy is a partial death. It is the escape from a sphere of its very essence. Once what was vexed becomes content, or what was cramped is set at liberty, or the growing circle is complete, everything must be begun again. A man, in a word, must begin to pursue a new object, larger than any of the objects attained, yet just as incomplete to begin with. Who but yourself, Sordello, started with perfection (beheld in your Goito dreams) and soon found it pall? For men salvation grows out of removing hindrances. They are not creatures caught up, as it were, to the mountain's summit, there to behold an unmixed heaven, to which, however, it is not in their nature to soar. Their eyes look upward from the mountain's foot; and so, between you, with your plain view of heaven, and these throngs of climbers, there lie forests and heights and mists, through which they rise, made glad by their arrival at one point after another. In their soul they seek the whole of joy by seeking it in parts; if the whole were secured at once, could they go

back and enjoy these parts now they have experienced them in the whole and need not struggle toward them? The time we count meagre for the attainment of each part would be found more than enough for the whole when acquired, for there would be nothing more at which to aim. To look upon objects once desired and now obtained soon satiates us; but to look up to some new thing gives life so keen a zest that only a tithe of its interest has been tasted when death puts forth his arresting hand.

291-320. Declining to help the people, Sordello will take the shortest way to his own joy,

"Throw yourself, therefore, into real life, Sordello, and it will engross you to the end. Give body and spirit the first right they claim—the right to live in the present. Feed yourself on the delightful reflection that you, who belong to a grander city than is seen on earth, are neither in body nor in soul one of the common tribe—that you can force joy for yourself out of the sorrow of your time, and, while appearing to barter your splendid gifts for the muck of sensual indulgence, can educe from that a precious sense of pleasure. Put into your crucible what the world discards. These miserable creatures are of no value to any but yourself, and would remain as valueless if you took nothing out of them. And if your genius can so use the circumstances of their life as you find them, are the people robbed? Would you could wrench more out of your power over them! As it is, with this call to help through the Guelf cause, they claim a service which ruins you and will not save them. Why should sympathy command you to quit the course that leads to your joy, and will not deliver them from their woe? Do all men wish to arrive at joy? Reversing your former plan of helping them on their way, help them by not interfering with any one till the whole race be set free from sorrow. If all struggle up to joy at last, why should they grudge your having attained it, through your special fortune and genius, a little sooner than they? By all means let their future be prosperous, but how this badge would improve your present!"

**321-361. Which, at small extra cost of suffering to individuals, he will find in hatred, lust, and tyranny.**

That even-tide, the remainder of his life, which he might decide to spend for the world, or against it, or in its own fashion, grew, in its capacity for selfish joy, gigantic in comparison with the vast impotence of the world to profit at the expense of his sacrifice of the badge.

"Why," he continued, "should I make nothing of my life because it must be so short? Let me on that account make more of it! Instead of using the bringing of joy to men as my method of winning my happiness, let me use their grief. Let me not wait for the savour that will come later from the sacrifice of self—let me leave untried what bliss will be derived from virtue like rich sweet wine, and squeeze vice like a biting spirit from my lees of life. Let me use the opportunity given me now of satiating wrath, hatred, lust, and all manner of tyrannies. Time may show that these are mischiefs wrought upon the people, but Sordello will have slipt away, and it will be over his body in Goito's crypt that you will point the moral that such a fiery thrill of sin must be extinguished in cold ashes. Yes, let my few remaining years be quick with evil doing! An amount of sand which, when quiet, cannot grow three tufts of grass shall, when hurled to and fro by the whirlwind, destroy the growth of all the glebe. Only let me do something at last! And if the crowd smart a little for my short activity, it is only one pang the individual will suffer—only one drop of blood will each of the crowd contribute to the bowl which, when filled, tempts the sluggish asp to waken up: only a little will each contribute to the sum of pleasures that will disentrance me from my idleness and inspire me to dance my dance of sin. For who sits lonely when power is lying to his hand? Have Taurello's huge hands really hewn out a home—given me a multitude I can affect—and set me there to get a taste of real life? Oh life! Ere I sleep my last sleep, let me accomplish something; let me live ere I die. Let the life that is all about me stream,

directly and indirectly, upon my soul; let none of it go past. Hindrances to my delight? They but make it piquant. Helps to it? Why should I repeat that, the higher my soul can rise, the deeper in degradation it can sink to find its joy. Enough that I can live!

361-414. He will not neglect earth for any angelic heaven.

"Wait for some transcendent future life! Never!—though, all the same, for that life I trust my soul to Fate; for, like one who throws a handful of dust—so easy was her act—she chequered the void with beauties that diversely affect my soul: what marvel, then, if, when these are consigned to nothingness by death, she should fashion for me, at another throw, a still superber spectacle? What light may there be hereafter instead of this sun? What may wander over me as moon? What will wind about me like the pleasures I shall have left behind? How will whatever takes the place of flesh cling around me? What will the new laughter be? Will the new sleep refresh like the sleep of earth? I cannot tell; but assuredly Fate is exhaustless in power to shape a grander world for me. But would she therefore have me leave alone this present life? Does she bid me quench my thirst at this first rivulet, or does she bid me count no draught worth drinking unless it come from some rocky fount above the clouds? And the stream here below is so sweet, with the voice in its pearly waters, over which hang shady trees, and its face of reate and sedge, and its silver beads and golden gravel beneath. It would be too absurd to slight the pleasure of the body for the hereafter! Let me quench my thirst here first, then go to a spring elsewhere—deck my hair with lilies of home ere I deck them with the lotus of a foreign land. Here, now, is the crowd. It forms the interest and chance of this present life, and I will use it one way or another. Heartily would I serve it with my life if that would really bring men good; but, if this be no service, why should they ask anything of me? If there are men who, seeing a better life beyond

death, cannot help setting aside this life, why should I refuse the gift? I take it, with its grand chance of self-indulgence. I will go through with it, and never will I howl that it were better to be stock or stone than a creature whose wants cannot be satisfied. I will praise this world, which you call the mere anteroom to the palace of a future life. Suppose it be nothing more! Shall my foot assume the courtly gait, my tongue its artificial speech, and my mouth its smirk, a single moment before the palace-doors fly open? What! Shall I do nothing in the anteroom, with its gay swarms of guards and valets, pages and waiting-girls? Shall I have no pleasure in displacing pert claimants and securing a favourable position for down-hearted suitors—in laughing at the sleek parasite and breaking his own staff over the pompous usher's shoulders? Why, when admitted to the royal presence by and by, should I grieve, among the new joys there, over having left these other joys behind me? That the presence-chamber is floored with precious stones does not make me decline the pleasures of its less costly anteroom.

414-428. Rather let heaven be earth intensified.

"A future world in which the most precious things of this earth are but floor-work? I am no such fool as to desire any such change. Rather, if I must miss this earth for heaven, and mine were the choosing, I would ask to have, only in a higher degree, the pleasures that are here. Give me firmer arm and fleeter foot, but do not turn my limbs into wings—so soft is our green-sward to the tread. I have no desire to rest aloft upon the thundercloud. We feel the bliss the more keenly that we have bodily organs, distinct from our spirits, to serve our purposes. Better to have a heaven through which I can move palpably than to fly through whole systems of worlds. Let my heaven be an intenser earth, with still a heaven above it!

"Yet the cup of life, the extreme dull dregs of which I would now drink, was so often, just when full, dashed

from my lips. Surely I shall taste at last! To shun death and grasp the joy of selfishness is my one longing —to shun death, which yet has so often revealed to men a better life, which this life conceals, and which sage and champion and martyr have fearlessly pursued by paths of horrid torture. It was well for them; and I also would welcome death if I could see a better life behind. Only let what proves itself stronger than this present life disclose itself to me, and I will gladly die. But no empty moral conventions! My appeal is made to what I really feel; it is my feeling that makes me, and I know what I feel. What is truth, or right? One object, seen from different points, may appear beautiful or ugly according to the beholder's eye, but why must only one of its sides be right? Is there anything to bid a man choose one and reject its opposite? For me there is no abstract right. Right, for me, has always expressed itself in circumstances, and it must be pursued through every change in a life's history, since every period demands its own law and conduct. Any one of three courses might at this time constitute the right for me. I might govern men regally with the Emperor, or I might obey him like his most timid-hearted serf, or I might start up suddenly, like a thought of God's, refuse this proffered power and wealth for the people's sake, and call upon whoever will to come and pick up the privileges I fling away."

**429-457. Right will not restrain him, for right consists in the strongest interest.**

291. 'tempts.' Attempts.

295. 'a pageant-city's.' Of the ideal Rome?

301. 'The world's discardings!' It is difficult to say whether this means the miserable multitude or the things condemned, conventionally at least, by the world (l. 333 f.)

311. 'till.' Used, as in the phrase 'True till death,' without any terminative sense.

371. 'wander.'

> "To behold the wandering moon
> Riding near her highest noon."
>
> —Milton's *Il Penseroso.*

381. 'reate.' The water crowfoot. The name may be applied generally to the floating plants of a stream.

". . . let it" (the pond) "dry six or twelve months to kill the water-weeds, as water-lilies, candocks, reate, and bulrushes, that breed there."—Walton's *Complete Angler*.

382. 'grail.' A contraction of 'gravel.'

391. 'cannot choose.' See l. 433 f.

399. 'trope.' Perhaps in its ordinary meaning of 'figure of speech.'

409. 'should thought of having lost.' An answer to the idea that we should not enjoy the present because it is fleeting.

411. 'citrine.' Of a greenish-yellow colour, like a citron.

'pyropus-stone.' A translucent deep-red gem, allied to the garnet. (πῦρ, 'fire,' and ὤψ, 'eye,' 'face.')

445. 'a single of the sides.' There may be an unabashed realism in morals as in art.

448. 'still present, still to be pursued.' In youth he was endued with a certain right, and right is present in each stage, but it is not the same as the right in the stage before. There is no such thing as right apart from a man's circumstances and feelings, and these change.

455. 'Brutus.' There is no reference to any particular action of his. He shattered the regal power by banishing the Tarquin, but he did not seize on any of the broken power for himself. Scorning to reap any personal advantage, Sordello might fling down the badge, and thus, as well as by his gift of speech, destroy the Imperial power in Lombardy.

## Ll. 457-603.

*Sophistry over, Sordello again faces the truth, and now also understands its philosophy. He has made himself miserable through failing to accept the limitations imposed upon the soul by this earthly life. In this life —and the principle applies to all spheres of future existence—a man's joy grows out of his proportioning to this life's conditions the amount of soul to be exercised, and it is love alone that can make a genius like Sordello accept such limitation. Sordello has been a god to himself; but what need a man has of a Divine Power, Who, being of different essence, is*

*worthy of his whole being's worship, and, at the same time, of some attracting Power on earth, which has been selected for him by God, and represents His authority.*

457-484. Sordello sees that our good and evil and other qualities are conditioned by time,

Then, as one who should pass through the outer parts of the earth and on till he comes upon the nucleus from which it grew, Sordello passed down through the secondary states of his soul's essence to the essence itself—to the inmost, deep yearnings of which these are but a covering; and, as one might most easily reach that nucleus when half the globe is dissolved, so the last truth Sordello saw was evolved by the break up of his fleshly part. Free from its binding power, he perceived that ill and good, sorrow and joy, beauty and ugliness, virtue and vice, the larger and the less—in short, all qualities recognised on earth—might be merely modes of time and this one world of matter, and incapable of binding eternity (as they bind time) or mind (as they bind matter), if mind and eternity should choose to assert their attributes within a life conditioned otherwise than ours. These attributes, girt now with earthly circumstance, may in another sphere be girt quite differently—with a different good and a different evil, though with joys and sorrows still contrived, as they are here, to render easy or difficult a particular course of life under whatever takes the place of flesh, according as that course harms or benefits the arrangements of the new sphere in which it must be run, that these attributes may be prevented from flying beyond it.

485-549. And that he has failed through trying to rise above temporal limitations.

No sooner was this truth apprehended than Sordello felt himself alone, away from time and earth, and understood the failure of his career. What was the secret of his past despair, which had been greatest when he was greatest in his self-sufficiency? He had been made mad by craving, not some power he did not possess, but the expansion of the power he had. The secret of his despair lay in this: that he had been

thrusting too much soul on his bodily nature. Joy comes when just a certain amount of soul exerts itself, in time, upon matter, and, if the soul try to sublime matter beyond the plan and so prevent, more or less, the intended proportion, there follows sorrow. Let the soul, the employer of the body, adapt itself to the body's capabilities. Without looking to anything beyond them, let a man continually fit his infinite soul to its finite conditions. His soul, changing only in degree according to each state of existence, will always remain essentially the same. Indeed, the soul being absolute, 'small' and 'great,' as applied to its different sets of limiting conditions, are mere terms we bandy here.

Now, to this present sphere, which we call human life, there belong certain conditions. Take only one. Sordello's body was to be young so long and no longer; but, because he failed to control his soul to that bodily limitation, his soul took upon herself to understand better than his body what his body was fit for—his soul would gladly have conveyed her own boundlessness to the body's bounded lot. Hence, his soul being permanent, and his body very different, having, in fact, scarcely its minute for enjoyment here, his soul insisted on overtasking her weak companion's capabilities and trying to extort a joy she considered worth experiencing; but, when that joy was far from being even half discovered, the short time apportioned to the body for its proper joy was irretrievably gone. When, for example, morn rose upon the earth, Sordello yearned for the enjoyment of all it awoke, from the volcano's flag of vapour, which winds hoist black over the spread of sea, down to the valley's silken barley-spikes, weighed down by rain to rise heavily again; and thus he missed genuine enjoyment of any one of nature's aspects. Ere half of all the music such a morning was framed to afford had been discovered, his finger, which should have plucked one string, was palsied. His soul, itself absolute, would not subject itself to the

520-532. He would miss the joy of natural scenery by trying to clutch it all.

sphere, or binding conditions, of the body, but tried to take in more of the scene than the body would admit. One may call the limited capacity to take in the whole of it a small sphere, but its restrictive power could not be evaded any more than that of a so-called large sphere. No marvel if the soul, beholding the sad sight of the body lost to its proper use and enjoyment entirely through her officious help—virtue, good, beauty, all let slip—should fain, to make up for it, try to make the body do what it was beyond its time to do, and, by teaching it that these qualities called virtue, good, and beauty were the concern of time only, make it, by her sheer impelling force, rise above its limitations, that in this way the body, though once barred on its way, might still advance, and, though hitherto vanquished, might still obtain reward—that it might still reap joy where natural conditions intended sorrow for the harvest, and turn evil into its good. The result of such a course must always be what it was in Sordello's case. The poor body sinks under what was meant to be a wondrous boon, and leaves the soul, its brilliant accomplice, all aghast.

533-549. He had sought compensation by driving his body beyond its powers.

This, then, was the error that had worked in Sordello's past. In order to be complete for and satisfy eternity, which is the whole series of spheres, his soul tried to exceed, and consequently proved incomplete for, the single sphere of time. But can we understand nothing beyond Sordello's mistake and its nature? Is there no truth that will deliver a man from committing it? Is the hindrance to the proper living of a human life broken down only by the failing of the fleshly yoke, and removed only for the short interval that is likely to elapse before the soul is bound by the conditions of another existence? Is life, which should be enjoyed, to be always just missed? For Sordello's life would have been enjoyed if only the soul's purpose and the body's had been ordered aright—if the soul's purpose had been no whit beyond the capability of the body under her

550-584. A man truly lives when soul is proportioned to body.

power. If properly proportioned, soul would never begin to excite discontent with her earthly lot, but would rather teach the body to know its own place if it rebelled. But what will enable a man to order his life thus? Must he either, as the way of most in this sad world is, brutalise his soul by muffling her eyes to all that was before and all that shall be after the present life, or, going to the other extreme, be regardless of every quality save some sole immutable good, which he is ever pursuing? Is the golden mean impossible? May a soul never see all the great Before and After and the small Now, and be saved, even though he do see how small the Now is, by taking the simple course prescribed by this life's conditions; as the king-bird, with ages on his plumes, travels on to die in ancestral glooms? But where do we descry the love that will select the course to which a soul will be brought so to limit herself? Here is Sordello, enriched by nature with a thousand interests, from trees and flowers to the multitude: does he decide to save the multitude—has he a love that will make him take up even now the task of its salvation?

585-589. Love alone will make him choose this limitation.

Ah, my Sordello, this once I befriend and speak for you. What need there is of a Power always above you, which, utterly incomprehensible in its nature, is inimitable and beyond your rivalry, and which, therefore, you can love! And, at the same time, what utter need of —not what could lead you a single step toward the comprehension of that great nature outside your own being—not what could teach you anything of its essence and so let rivalry begin to live, but—a Power that should represent that higher Power in this life, and, having all its authority, though acting directly and through the understanding on man's heart, should, as the Human clear, reveal the earthly course chosen for you by the Divine concealed.

590-603. Sordello had need of God and, not less, of an earthly object to represent God and claim his service.

457. 'when the past.' See Bk. II., ll. 355-415, and 775-781.

467. 'his flesh-half's break-up.'

> "The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
> Lets in new light through chinks that time has made."
> —Waller's *Verses upon his Divine Poesy.*

537. 'Virtue, Good, Beauty.' Browning's conception of what makes a moral life would be an interesting, if perplexing, study.

550. 'proper in.' Surely this should be 'proper to.' The mistake belonged to Sordello's past.

558. 'Sordello, self-sufficient.' Originally 'The spirit, self-sufficient'; which is much better. Sordello has now lost his self-sufficiency.

565. 'yonder breadth.' See l. 11 f.

576. 'all and each quality.' Supply before this 'or muffle the soul's eyes to.'

583. 'the king-bird.' The phœnix, which, according to the story told to Herodotus (Bk. II., ch. lxxiii.), makes up a quantity of myrrh in the shape of an egg and as large as it can carry, hollows it out, inserts in it the body of the father bird, and bears it from Arabia to Egypt, where it is buried in the temple of the sun. Herodotus says nothing of the rising of the phœnix from the ashes of the father bird.

590. 'I this once befriend.' How? By showing that it was impossible for Sordello to make his life efficient, since he had missed the great truth that a man must give himself to the object he is formed to love? This would be no great defence. The words probably refer to the passage beginning with l. 603, in which we learn that Sordello did, in his dying hour, recognise and accept that truth.

598. 'of a Power its representative.' It is impossible to find in this passage the slightest hint of Christian dogma. The representative Power on earth and the incomprehensible Power above are of absolutely distinct essence. Here the truth through neglect of which Sordello's career failed is stated as a proposition. A man must have something he loves if he is to live a life worth living, and it depends on his 'degree' of nature (ll. 64-83) what that object is. As we learned from the second part of Bk. III., Sordello ought to have loved what we should call morally good in itself, but troubadour-singing was enough for Eglamor — he at least goes to a good place — the love of Sordello for Palma, and hatred of the House of Este (a hatred he loved !) for Salinguerra.

600. 'communication different.' The interpretation here is very doubtful.

## Ll. 603-633.

*Has Sordello found such a love? When Palma and Taurello return to the presence-chamber they find him dead, with the baldric beneath his foot. He has given himself, though late, to his life's truth.*

603-621. Sordello's choice and death.

Has Sordello found love? Can his spirit go the mighty round of all his other aims and efforts to end where poor Eglamor began? So the two eagles, according to the old fable, went about the world, and where they met, though on a waste of shifting sand, men built the temple of Jove. Quick! Has Sordello found love? Palma and Taurello approach from the gallery below: is that footstep Palma's? No, it is Salinguerra, clad as he is in mail, whose tread is so quick and light. They mount—reach the threshold—dash the hangings aside, and there—you guess who sat there dead, the badge under his foot. Yes! Sordello has found love: he has made the people's cause his choice. And still, as Palma told, a triumph lingered in the wide eyes—wider than those of some spent swimmer when he spies help from above in his extreme despair and, with upturned face, turns toward it with short, quick, passionate cry. As Palma pressed her lips upon his breast in one great kiss, his heart still beat.

621-633. As his early and only choice, care for the people should have made his life.

By this time the hermit-bee has stopped his day's toil at Goito. Evening come, the new-cropped vine-leaf which he so busily bit and twirled and filed all day answers its purpose: the house God bade him make is finished. It would be as easy to become a third with the small, unfrighted bee and God, and hear the word that passed between them, as to find the slightest flaw in his work. He has wrought according to his nature, and so is racked by no thought of the stone maidens and stone font, works of the greater creature

man, which he leaves when he creeps through the crevice in the wall of the vault. But Sordello, whom they soon afterwards laid in that same old font-tomb —alas! he had aimed at a life for which his nature was never meant.

606. 'the two eagles.' "Zeus, wishing to ascertain the exact centre of the earth, caused two eagles to fly at the same time at equal speed from the eastern and western ends of the earth. They met at Delphi, which was therefore regarded as the centre. Two golden eagles were therefore set up in the temple of Apollo there." (See J. G. Frazer's *Pausanias*, vol. v. p. 315.)

Through a round of 'much tribulation' Sordello learned the truth which Eglamor knew from the beginning, and by which he was blessed all through his career. The illustration is very obscurely expressed. The world is regarded as a sphere. Do both spirits go round it? Love is the centre where they meet, but Eglamor was never away from love.

616. 'some spent swimmer's.'

> "A solitary shriek, the bubbling cry
> Of some strong swimmer in his agony."
>
> —Byron's *Don Juan*.

621. 'the hermit-bee.' "I once saw a solitary bee nipping a leaf round till it exactly fitted the front of a hole; his nest, no doubt; or tomb, perhaps. . . . Well, it seemed awful to watch that bee—he seemed so *instantly* from the teaching of God." (*Letters*, vol. i. p. 371.)

It is one of the Megachile species, the members of which are furnished with a scissor-like apparatus. The female (not 'he') cuts longitudinal strips and perfect circles out of leaves, and with these she builds in a crevice a line of cells, shaped somewhat like thimbles, in which she deposits her eggs.

'By this.' Before the hour of Sordello's death.

## Ll. 633-681.

*After Sordello's death Taurello Salinguerra sinks back into Romano, and his relation to the poet is hushed up.*

And now is it worth our while to remember, let alone record, how Salinguerra extricated himself without Sor-

633-655. After Sordello's death, Taurello abandons all thought of independent action;

dello? The minstrel gone, are we not to care whether Ghibellin or Guelf prevailed—whether Count Richard of Verona was left in durance or the Marquis of Este paid a ransom for his release? The end of it all, at any rate, was peace. Taurello made some frank proposal that prospered, was complimented right and left on its success, and became a nine-days' wonder for statecraft. Then, though so lately he might have made himself supreme, he by one effort blotted out of his mind the great hope of overthrowing the House of Este in the grand style prophesied that mad evening in San Pietro, and, content that the brothers Ecelin and Alberic escaped all blame in connection with the seizure of the Count, sent away the Papal Legate and the envoys of the Lombard League, despatched a letter to the Monk (who heard it out patiently, then curled up his limbs on his wolf-skin mat, and never spoke again), and informed the Ferrarese that he retained rule over them only while the

655-673. Marries Sophia, a daughter of Monk Ecelin;

two sons were in pupilage. Lastly, there being no other way of keeping safe for Frederick the direct road from Germany to Lombardy—no way, that is, of making sure that whoever should next obtain the dowry of Sophia, the youngest of the tribe of daughters with whom Ecelin II. had been wont to bribe magnates who were jealous of his power (and indeed, since she married Henry of Egna, dead a year ago, the Trentine Pass had remained open to the Emperor)—he, in pure necessity, married her himself. His last chance of building up an independent power for himself being thus gone, he made void all the prophecies of his greatness, and, in spite of his many schemes, open and secret, the deeds of his youth and his age's dreams, was absorbed in Romano. And he so hushed up what happened

673-681. And gets his relationship to Sordello hushed up.

on the night on which Sordello died that when, among the other woes of Ferrara detailed in an ill-assorted chronicle, there was noted this obscure one of "Salinguerra's only son Giacomo, who died, fatuous and doting, before his father," the citizens were much astonished, and could only wonder which of his five sons by Sophia was meant.

636. 'without Sordello.' To work for.

668. 'Himself espoused.' This is historical. Sofia was the third of the children of Ecelin II. and Adelaide, Palma being the first, Cunizza the last, Ecelin the fourth, and Alberic the fifth. (Rolandini Chronicon in Muratori's *Scriptores Rerum Italicarum.*)

## Ll. 681-796.

*After Ecelin III. and Alberic have, in their cruel fashion, strengthened the Ghibellin cause, Taurello is taken as a captive to Venice and kept there; and the two brothers, becoming intolerable, meet their death.*

681-716. The Ghibellin cause prospers under Ecelin III. and Alberic.

The jaws of the people's dead hope were slow to collapse and spoil its beautiful features; but these features waxed duller and duller the next year, when the Guelf leaders withdrew each to his stronghold. Then, at last, after Monk Ecelin had died at Campese and had been laid to rest at Solagna, with cushioned head and gloved hand to denote the cavalier he was, young Ecelin's heart smote him for his inactivity. He had long since grown up, yet, except for the Vicenza business, what results had he obtained in fire and bloodshed? (It was so hard to pause to tell about him while Sordello was on the scene!) Now he steps on Lombardy as its new lord. In the nick of time, when Ecelin and Alberic have just arranged with Taurello that he shall serve them as he served their father, come news that half the people in Verona refuse allegiance to their Marquis, Azzo of Este, and to Count Richard, and have cast them from a throne which they now bid Ecelin mount as their podestà because of his ancestral worth. Thither he flew, and henceforth the town was wholly his, Taurello sinking down from his temporary headship to his old obscure hard work. Hearing of the acquisition of Verona, Frederick did come to Lombardy, but the old warrior to whom he had sent the badge and rescript stood unnoticed in the background. A year or two later the Ghibellins took

Vicenza, and left the Marquis scarcely a nook to hide in; and when two or three hundred Guelfs—vile Bassanese — calling themselves 'The Free' conspired to oppose Alberic, Ecelin slaughtered them so easily and in such style that often a little Salinguerra would look up and ask his father how old he would have to be to get appointed his proud uncle's page.

717-727. Old Taurello,

Some years later that father had dwindled down to a mere showy, turbulent soldier, still famous—a subtle man, no doubt, but hardly (the people thought) so astute as his contemporaneous friends professed. Undoubtedly he was a brawler; but all his neighbours made allowance for the old fellow, and let him keep his incorrigible ways. Men who suffered through him never fretted: they would have missed the soldier whose name was used to frighten them when boys. "Trap the ostrich," they said, "but suffer our bald osprey to flap a battered wing." But—to bring his story to a close—the old osprey gave one flap too much. The fleet of Venice was interfered with,

727-745. Captured at Ferrara,

and there was no overlooking that. Some of the citizens captured him at Ferrara, more by fraud than by force, to tell the truth, as he sat fat and florid at a banquet. Now, there is little credit in helping a man of eighty to his death—fate will soon enough cut through the life-cord whose last threads you fritter away—so, when the veteran was presiding at the head of his own board, with the old smile that was meant to tell you that all went well with Frederick (as if he were likely to tell when it was otherwise), in rushed our friends, made a pretence of fighting, apologised for doing this shame to his old age, gained their galleys, and bore him off to

746-755. Enjoys an easy captivity at Venice.

Venice. There he was set down gently, as it were, and left free to go his own way and to look at the square, where, if groups of citizens gathered to show their children how the Magnifico, who once almost became a king on the mainland, was going his way among them now, he would pretend to watch the swallows flying their eternal circle between Theodore and Mark. "In-

deed," the seniors would remark, "it took Ecelin all his time to supersede that man."

755-796. Cruelties and death of Ecelin and Alberic.

Sordello's inability to put himself openly at the head of the people when the crisis caused by the Imperial badge and rescript came—an inability due to the strange belief, which had pervaded his life, that there was nothing worth doing—thrust under Taurello's tutelage Ecelin and Alberic, whom he forthwith bound fast in one rod to baffle God, who loves the world. Thus did Sordello allow the thin, grey, wizened, dwarfish Ecelin and the muscular, big-boned Alberic to give a quick and horrible solution of the minstrel's problem by proving that, wherever there is a will to do, there is plenty to be done, of evil or of good. With unspeakable tortures the two brothers plagued the world; but a touch of the spirit of Hildebrand made some Lombards band together in a crusade against them and, by saving Milan, win the world's applause. Ecelin perished; and I think grass never grew so pleasantly as in Valley Rù, near San Zenon, where Alberic, in his turn, after being regaled on seeing his exasperated captors burn his wife and seven children, was tied to a wild horse and trailed through raunce and bramble-bush. I testify that God laid the villain's castle in ruins. You hear its bell toll from the one tower left by last year's earthquake, which laid low the modern church beneath—no harm in that!—and amid the wild brake above the ruins the grasshopper chirps, the lizard rustles, and the cushats chirre. There, at noontide a week ago, I heard the old Canon say that with his own eyes he saw a mound burst and Alberic's huge skeleton disinterred, only five years before, and he added: "June's the month for carding off the first cocoons spun by our silkworms"—two pieces of information, of which neither he nor I could tell which was the worthier of note. You may decide!

692. 'Vicenza's business.' Was he not fulfilling the promise of his babyhood?

706. 'who missed Taurello.' He cannot have been so very obscure. "Several Italian nobles," says Kington (*History of Frederick II.*, ch. xvi.), "were at the Diet of Verona, but the son of Salinguerra was the only one who obtained anything."

726. 'The ostrich' and 'our bald osprey.' Cp. Bk. IV., l. 59 and l. 63.

730. 'She captured him.'

"Montelongo now planned a detestable act of treachery. He drew the noble Azzo into his plot, although that chief at first shrank from the Legate's proposal to break their oath made to Salinguerra. They had promised to allow the Ghibelline to return safe home; they kept their promise to the ear. Shortly afterwards, while partaking of Salinguerra's wine in his own house, the Guelfs unfolded their plot. . . . Salinguerra began to defend himself, but the old man could not make his voice heard amid the scraping of feet that ensued. He left the room, but was seized and taken to Venice by the Doge, according to the advice of the Legate." (Kington's *History of Frederick II.*) According to Muratori (*Annali d'Italia*, anno 1240), Salinguerra went to the allies ('al campo de' collegati') on their invitation to treat about peace. The old man spent four years at Venice, where he died.

736. 'you fritter.' In this case, by captivity.

738. 'were like to tell.' Or does it mean he never talked politics? You could guess from his satisfied look that things were going well. But was Taurello not too deep to let his mind be read?

749. 'Theodore and Mark.' The two pillars in the square of St Mark's.

757. 'that evening.' This is difficult to explain. If Sordello had given his help to the Guelfs all through his career, Taurello could scarcely have offered him the badge. Apart from this phrase, the passage is simple enough.

764. 'devil Ecelin.' Words almost fail historians when they attempt to describe his cruelty.

775. 'Ecelin perished.' He was defeated and taken at Bassano. When in prison he tore off his bandages and died.

777. 'where Alberic.' Unable to hold the castle of San Zenon, he secured the safety of his followers by surrendering himself, with his wife, six sons, and two daughters. His sons were slain and their limbs flung at his face, and his wife and daughters were burnt to death. Before he was tied to the horse his flesh was torn by pincers. (See Milman's *Latin Christianity*, &c.)

781. 'raunce.' Marble-stone?

788. 'chirre.' Probably a form of 'chirp.'

"Not a cricket chirred."—Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, XCV.

## Ll. 797-818.

*Eglamor is eternally the same in his love, humility, and generosity.*

797-818. In the higher realms, Eglamor ever looks up admiringly to greater poetic spirits.

And now even Naddo, the last of my characters, is gone. But no! Eglamor never goes. When my spirit became a guest of the heavenly courts, I knew the face I was waiting to see. It was strange to observe how, in spite of ill reports, disuse, and the wear of some years, that face retained its joyous look of love. From sun to sun my spirit held its upward flight through ever grander circles of life and light, and always that face was there, the last to show itself—crossed, too, with some concern that perfect triumph was not sure for all and depression must rest on a few. But this concern soon passed. Only for a little did he experience a painful sense of incomplete freedom from his inferior nature, from which rose slight tears that were easily wiped away, and small jealousies that were soon extinguished in irrepressible admiration of other spirits. He aspired not to the lot of those who, just as they prepared to ascend, wished him well, and hovered over his frank delight at the track they followed without him—hovered over his upturned, fervid face.

797. 'Naddo gone.' Cp. Bk. v., l. 1012, where, however, the original reading was, "Ah, Naddo's gone!"

801. 'disuse.' Of the poetic art? But he is still a minor poet (l. 806).

804. 'gyres of life and light.'

> "Deep folly! yet that this could be—
> That I could wing my will with might
> To leap the grades of life and light,
> And flash at once, my friend, to thee."
>
> —*In Memoriam*, XLI.

816. 'impend.' As illustrations of the transitive use of this verb, *The New English Dictionary* gives "The dreadful Judgments that now impend the nations" (Penn's *Liberty of Conscience*), and "The alarming danger which impended her" (Shelley's *Zastrozzi*).

## Ll. 819-872.

*Posterity invents for Sordello the reputation he has failed to gain, and the only real thing bequeathed by his life is a snatch of the Goito lay.*

**819-851. How Sordello lived in popular report.**

As for the minstrel, many a tale was soon born of his retreat from the scene. It was not the common idea that he had died in choosing the service of man. Chroniclers recorded at length how Sordello Prince Visconti saved their town and performed distinguished deeds; and thus, as fortune would have it, he passed with posterity as, to all intents, the god he never could become, men never ceasing to praise him as knight and bard and gallant. But from his failure to be what he should and could have been, and was not—the friend and helper of the people—we suffer to this day. Ere Dante could come and, for the world's sake, take up the cause Sordello had rejected till his life was at its close, Ecelin, by establishing the Ghibellin party in new strength, had destroyed for a reformer the chance of finding his opportunity in that of the Guelfs. By using the Ghibellin cause, Dante did much, but he never had the chance given to Sordello. Thus, if Sordello had taken that one great step of using the Guelf cause for the people's good, he would have been lauded for the brilliant qualities he was anxious men should recognise in him. All these would have been added unto him. But it was only the reputation of being rich in the most splendid attributes he wished to come to him; he did not desire the things themselves for which he sought to be praised; indeed, he would have been content to have the reputation of great deeds while he really idled at home, and the few things he had achieved he was glad to have achieved because they

proved that they were not of genuine interest to him; which saved him the trouble of doing them again. He was like a tree that wishes to be known as rich in fruit yet has not itself sufficient desire for fruit to make it bring forth any. But had Sordello embraced the cause of the people, his life would have had an interest that would have drawn forth his powers in hearty exercise, and would have borne the most precious fruit in the help of the people; and, praising him for that, men would have thrown in by the way a reputation for the qualities which his work for them would have revealed—qualities in which he had been anxious to shine, but in which he had taken no genuine delight. A sorry farce, after all, is a life with nothing for which to care or to labour.

851-872. He has left behind a gem he valued not.

Can I not say that he did leave some little real thing behind him? Yes—in this way. Higher and higher up a heathy brown hill by sparkling Asolo, in the mist and chill of the newly risen morn, runs a barefoot, rosy child. The sunlight falls on the castle's inner court's low wall, which looks like some extinct animal's spine half-covered with earth and flowers. Through the haze the boy has crossed the whole hillside, laid with dew and fine frost, which, except where there are slender patches of grey maize, make patterns on the balm and mountain camomile. Up and up he goes, singing all the while some unintelligible words of a snatch of such rare beauty that the lark, God's poet, swoons at his feet, so badly defeated does he feel by the music of

> "The few fine locks
> Stained like pale honey oozed from topmost rocks
> Sun-blanched the livelong summer"—

all that is left of the Goito lay. And thus bereft, sleep and forget Sordello. In a word, the feverish poet does sleep.

826. 'passed with posterity.' There befell him what the sixth company prayed for in Chaucer's *House of Fame*—

> "We han done neither that ne this,
> But ydel al our lyf y-be.
> But, natheless, yit preye we,
> That we mowe han so good a fame,
> And greet renoun and knowen name,
> As they that han don noble gestes,
> And acheved alle hire lestes."

Sismondi and others believe Sordello's great exploits were the invention of writers of a later time than his own; but see the Appendix.

831. 'at this day.' If Sordello had taken that one step, the age of 'knowledge by knowledge' would have been nearer than it is even now.

847. 'Hesperian fruit.' Like the apples, obtained, after long search, by Hercules, which grew in the garden of the Hesperides.

866. 'swooning at his feet.' Cp.—

> "And he sat him down in a lonely place,
> And chanted a melody loud and sweet,
> That made the wild-swan pause in her cloud,
> And the lark drop down at his feet."
>
> —Tennyson, *The Poet's Song.*

870. 'thus bereft.' Of the reputation he sought, which was not his in his lifetime?

## Ll. 872-886.

*Browning wakens those who have fallen asleep during the performance of* Sordello, *and asks his audience to give his strange tale a chance.*

And I fear some in my audience are asleep also! Wake up, friends! The ghost is gone, and I would fain hope the story ends sweetly, since, according to certain writers, a departed spirit is conjectured to be a peri or a ghoul as it vanishes in a stink or in a perfume. Now, friends, be frank! I warrant you smell civet. Really? Likely enough you believe you do; but what you take for a bad odour is really a

rare scent, to which you must get accustomed before you can enjoy it. A nose may smell and smell at a rose: let it rifle a musk-pod with impunity! I would tell you that, as you gradually come to enjoy the scent of the musk-pod, you will come to enjoy my poem if you give it time; but to say so might be to step beyond the bounds of modesty.

And now any of you that have cared to listen have heard Sordello's story told.

880. 'civet.' In its unprepared state.
883. 'like yours.' With this strong *Sordello* scent.

THE END.

# APPENDIX.

## THE HISTORICAL SORDELLO.

[Contributed by Dr Sutherland Black.]

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THE fullest collection of sifted facts about Sordello seems to be that of Fauriel in his work on *Dante et les origines de la langue et de la littérature Italiennes*, Paris, 1854, of which a good summary appears to be given in Scartazzini's edition of the *Divina Commedia*. Toynbee's *Dante Dictionary* (1898) reproduces substantially Fauriel's results, but with various other details of interest which seem to have been discovered since Fauriel's time by diligent Dante explorers.

Sordello 'of Mantua,' as he is usually called, was born—not in the city of Mantua, but in its territory—at Goito, some ten miles to the north-west of the town, *about* the year 1200. His father seems to have been a cavalier in somewhat poor circumstances; his poverty (so it is said) is reflected in the name he acquired—Ser Lo Corto or El Corte, meaning Sir Short of Funds (cp. Frederick of the Empty Pocket). The young Sordello soon showed poetic talent, and began to distinguish himself as a verse-maker. Somewhere about 1220 he appears to have been in Florence, and shortly after we find him in Verona at the court of Count Richard of Bonifazio, who in 1221 [1212?] or 1222 had married Cunizza, daughter of Ecelin II. da Romano. About 1226, at the bidding (it is said) of Ecelin III., who was actuated by political motives, Sordello abducted Cunizza from Verona and took her to the northern court at Treviso. In this neighbourhood he remained till about 1229, when, having incurred the resentment—the just resentment, let us say—of Ecelin III., he left Italy altogether,

and betook himself to Provence. He was now about thirty years of age. In Provence the next thirty-six years of his life were for the most part spent (for it is unnecessary here to take account of occasional visits to the courts of Leon, Castile, Aragon, and Portugal).

During the first sixteen years of this period the ruler of Provence and patron of Sordello was Ramondo Beringhieri (Raymund Berenger IV.) His court was a brilliant one, and one feature of it has been commemorated by Dante (*Par.* 6, 133-135): he had four daughters, who all lived to be queens. One of Sordello's most important extant poems belongs to the Berenger period—a sort of 'Adonais' or lament for the death of his brother poet Blacasso (Blacatz), written in 1240.

Raymund died in 1245, and in 1246 his youngest daughter and heiress, Beatrice, married Charles of Anjou, who thus became lord of Provence. On his arriving at the Countship, Sordello addressed a poem of welcome to him, exhorting him while yet in the prime of youth (he was now twenty-six) to address himself to noble deeds. This cannot fail to interest us when we remember that Charles was destined to become what a modern historian has described as 'the greatest champion the Guelf cause ever had,' and that, as we shall see, Sordello was ever his aider and abettor.

Sordello seems by-and-by to have received some fief from Charles, and to have been enrolled on the list of Provençal barons. But he did not accompany Charles on his crusading expedition in 1248; his letter of somewhat lame excuse is still extant.

On July 26, 1252, Sordello was one of those who signed as witnesses at Aix a treaty of peace between Charles and his rebellious Marseillaise subjects; and he figures again in the same capacity, also at Aix, June 6, 1257.

We hasten on from the second to the third and last period of the poet's life. In spring 1265 the great Guelf, his master, in response to the entreaties of Clement IV., embarked on the expedition in which he was to make good his claim to the crown of Sicily. Sordello was one of his followers. After the battle of Benevento (Feb. 1266), though Charles had been victorious, we find Sordello a prisoner. At all events, there still remains a brief of Clement IV. addressed to Charles (Sept. 22, 1266), in which the Pope reminds him that (among others) Sordello is languishing in captivity—at Novara —and urges his redemption. Presumably Sordello had some share in the battle of Tagliacozzo (Aug. 23, 1268), in which,

in the person of Conradin, the Hohenstauffen dynasty sustained its final defeat. Presumably; for when Charles made distribution of the Apulian fiefs among his Provençal barons, Sordello had various castles assigned to himself and his heirs; in a deed dated in March 1269, he is spoken of as 'Sordello of Goito, our right trusty and well beloved,' and reference is made to his services as having been 'great, acceptable, and welcome.' Again, in June 1269, he receives another castle in the Abruzzi in liferent. How long afterwards he lived we know not: neither the date nor the manner of his death is recorded. It is (to say the least) conceivable that he may have accompanied Charles in 1273 to Florence, and been present on the Guelf side at the negotiations in which Pope Gregory X. in person vainly sought to reconcile the feuds of the Guelfs and Ghibellins there.

It is in the Vision of Dante that Sordello comes vividly before us. On Sunday, March 27, 1300, late in the afternoon (so we are told), Dante came upon him, circling the base of the Mount of Cleansing, amongst those who had died a violent death unabsolved, but at the last moment repentant. The punishment of such is that they are detained outside Purgatory for a period equal to that of their lives on earth,—unless it be shortened by earthly prayers offered on their behalf. Dante, then, is our witness that Sordello cannot have died at the age of thirty, as early as in 1224.

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